Library of the Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.
Presented by Rev. A. B. Baker - 1883
BT 1101 .H64 1833
Hopkins, John Henry, 1792-1868.
Christianity vindicated, in seven discourses on the
Shelf

CHRISTIANITY VINDICATED,

IN

SEVEN DISCOURSES

ON THE EXTERNAL EVIDENCES

OF THE

NEW TESTAMENT,

WITH A CONCLUDING DISSERTATION.

BY JOHN HENRY HOPKINS, D. D.
Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Vermont.

Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος, καὶ πάσης ἀποδοχῆς ἄξιος, ὅτι Χριστὸς Ἰησους ἦλθεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἁμαρτωλους σωσαι.

1 *Tim.* 1 : 15.

BURLINGTON:
EDWARD SMITH.

M DCCC XXXIII.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1833, by Chauncey Goodrich, in the Clerks office of the District of Vermont.

TO THE

RIGHT REVEREND WILLIAM WHITE, D. D.

Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Pennsylvania,

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED,

AS A SLIGHT TRIBUTE OF THE HIGH REGARD,

CHERISHED BY THE AUTHOR

through many years,

FOR THE EMINENT WISDOM, CHRISTIAN MODERATION, AND

PURE CONSISTENCY OF HIS PERSONAL AND

OFFICIAL CHARACTER.

PREFACE.

The first six of the following discourses, together with a series of sermons on the Apostles' Creed, were composed several years ago in the ordinary course of parochial duty, and preached to the congregation of the Episcopal Church at Pittsburgh, with which the author was happily connected during the greater part of his ministerial life. They were subsequently delivered in Trinity Church, Boston, and, by special request, in St. Paul's Church of the same city. A strong desire that they should be published, was kindly expressed to the author by the leading members of the two first mentioned Churches, some of whom have since departed, as he trusts, to the Christian's rest: but the vestry of St. Paul's were pleased to manifest their wishes by a regular request, communicated to the author by their Secretary, in a form which not only demanded his grateful acknowledgments, but also called for his most serious consideration. Previous to his forming any conclusion, his removal to

Burlington, in consequence of his appointment to the Episcopal office, furnished an opportunity to repeat the discourses again. The result was a promise to his friends that he would publish them as soon as practicable, and this promise he now fulfils in part, by the present volume, which contains the six discourses on the external evidences of Christianity, with a seventh on the objections of infidelity, since composed. He has likewise added a Dissertation, designed to present, in a connected form, some proofs and illustrations belonging to the subject, which might, and perhaps would have been greatly extended, had not the pressure of other avocations, and the limits assigned to the volume, obliged him to hasten to a conclusion.

In justice to himself, the author would only add, that his calculations on the success of his book are not such as can lead to any serious disappointment. The external evidences of Christianity have been admirably handled in several well-known and deservedly popular works which have issued from the English press; and two very able treatises have lately been contributed to the same department in our own country, by Dr. Alexander, and Bishop Mc' Ilvaine, besides the volume published many years ago by Dr. Priestly. The apology of the author for adding another to the list, is the common, though not less true reliance, which all men are so prone to place upon the judgment of their friends. Should that judgment be verified by the event, in the present instance, he will rejoice; for no one can

estimate more highly the privilege of adding a good book to the stock of religious literature. But should the result be otherwise, he will not repine; because he is well aware that the power to effect much, in the walks of sacred composition, is given to few; and he will have duties enough remaining in the circle of his anxious stewardship, even if it should prove that he is not called to win an author's triumphs, or to share an author's cares.

Burlington Vt. July 25, 1833.

CONTENTS.

DISCOURSE I.

Condition of man in the present life—His ignorance without a revelation—The vast importance of our future destiny, and the folly of being indifferent to our fate—The character of those who are willing to enquire into religious truth—The benefit of a proper understanding of its evidences to the Christian—The difficulty of approaching the subject with an unprejudiced mind, and the necessity of a right disposition in order to receive truth on any subject, as well as on the subject of religion—General definition of religion—There are but two kinds of religion of which the origin is known to us, viz. Christianity and Mahometanism—Comparison of their evidences—All that is good in the system of Mahomet drawn from the Bible—Result, that Christianity is the true religion, or else that there is none—Examination of the religion of nature—Examination of the religion of Philosophers. . . . . 1—13

DISCOURSE II.

Introduction—The authorship of the New Testament Scriptures—Direct evidences on this question—Testimony of the fathers—of the martyrs—of the Emperor Constantine—of the enemies of Christianity—Impossibility of the primitive Christians being deceived—Practical effect of the rejection or the belief of these Scriptures. . . . . 14—30

DISCOURSE III.

Question examined whether the writers of the New Testament Scriptures could have been deluded in the miraculous facts which they relate, or whether they could have deluded others—Impossibility of either deception shewn from the nature of the cases respectively. . . . . 31—45

DISCOURSE IV.

Question why the Deity should have made his communications to the human race through men gifted with miraculous powers, instead of a direct revelation to each individual, considered, in reference to the objections and hypothesis of the infidel Rousseau. . . . . 46—64

DISCO URSE V.

Evidence afforded by prophecy—Quality of prophecy—Why obscure—Necessity for its obscurity—Objection of Rousseau. 65–85

DISCOURSE VI.

Evidence afforded by the establishment of the Church, through such agents and in such a period of the world—Reasoning of Gibbon on this subject—Its futility exposed. . 86—107

DISCOURSE VII.

Remaining objections of infidel writers to the Bible—Alleged interpolation in the books of Moses and Joshua—Alleged immodesty of the Scriptures—Alleged cruelty of the wars against the Canaanites—Alleged contradictions of the Scriptures—Specification of contradiction in the Genealogies given by the Evangelists Matthew and Luke—The argument of Mr. Hume against miracles examined—The objection against Christianity derived from the depravity of professed believers examined—Conclusion of the discourses. . . . . 108—128

DISSERTATION.

CHAPTER I.

§ 1. Proofs and illustrations of the argument presented in the first discourse, drawn from the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, and Pascal. . . . . p. 131—135

§ 2. Proofs of the assertion that Mahomet derived all that was good in his system from the Bible, and that his success was produced by the sword, exhibited from the contents of the Koran—Opinion of Tucker in his 'Light of Nature' on the first of these points. . . . . 135—138

§ 3. View of the discordant schemes of philosophers exhibited by extracts from Cicero, Voltaire, and Rousseau. 138—146

CHAPTER II.

§ 1. List of the Christian writers who flourished in the next age after the Apostles, with some notices of their works,—proving the canon of Scripture. . . . . 147—156

§ 2. List of the Christian writers of the third century, with some notices of their works—proving the canon of Scripture—List of Sacred books set forth by the Council of Laodicea. 157—163

CHAPTER III.

§ 1. Testimony borne by heathen writers to the truth of the Gospel facts—Acts of Pontius Pilate—Proposal of the Emperor Tiberius that Christ should be enrolled amongst the gods—Ex-

tract from Tacitus upon the persecution of the Christians under Nero—Epigram of Martial, alluding to the same—Quotation from Juvenal on the same point—Letter of Pliny to Trajan, on the persecution in Pontus and Bithynia, with the emperor's reply—Conclusion of the Dissertation. . . . . 164—174

DISCOURSE I.

ROM. X. 10.

WITH THE HEART MAN BELIEVETH UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS.

WHETHER we look around us, my brethren, and consider the actual condition of our race, with the eye of a mere observer, or look within us, and reflect upon the cares, the doubts, the sorrows, and uncertainties of our own lot, there is nothing which ought to interest us so deeply as the promises of the Gospel. Stripped of the hopes of religion, what is man? We come into life, helpless and suffering. Trials and difficulties hang upon our every step. We grow up to maturity, with aspiring views and ardent expectations. We grasp at happiness in every form of self-gratification. We seek it in labor and in toil. Wealth, ambition, pleasure, ease, are all supposed capable of yielding satisfaction to the heart. Friendships are formed and broken. Love intoxicates and deceives. Our years roll on in the contests of selfishness and the short and feverish delights of passion; and, at length, we sink into the grave, after passing our whole mortal existence in a succession of petty troubles and engrossing trifles, while the happiness we sought for eluded our pursuit at every turn.

Without revelation, impenetrable darkness rests upon the whole system of our being. Why we exist at all—whether there is a God who made us, and if there be, for what purposes we are made;—why it is that we are enveloped in mystery; the faculties of the mind—the powers of the body—the nature of the soul—all mocking our best attempts to understand them;—why it is that men always praise virtue, while they so rarely practice it, and never exhibit it in its true perfection;—why they are always condemning vice, and yet the world is filled with it;—why they are always pursuing knowledge, and yet are never satisfied—why they are always sighing for happiness, and yet are never content—why they all dread death, and yet never escape it;—whether there be a state hereafter, and what is its condition—whether eternity will open on us, when we close our connexion with time, or whether the stroke of dissolution annihilates our being;—whether the mounting spirit within us, with all its sublime energies and high desires, is destined for another and a nobler sphere; or whether the blessed sympathies of affection, the ardor of hope, the light of joy, the pulse of generous emotion, the beams of genius and the kindlings of imagination, must perish, forever, within the narrow confines of the tomb;—no man knows, or can know, how to solve any of these questions, until he learns his answer from the Word of God. And yet, surely, no enquiries are so deeply important to us all. Surely, indifference to the truth, upon such subjects, is, of all things, the most absurd. Men are active to avoid the least evils; they are prompt to secure the slightest advantages; they are moved at every peril which threatens their fortune,

or their health, or their family. How strange, then, to see them unmoved, when the question of eternity is before them. How deplorable to see them calm and regardless, when the truth of the system which assures them either of heaven or of hell, is to be decided. Surely, to a rational mind, this want of solicitude, in the most weighty question which concerns humanity, exhibits a monstrous instance of infatuation or of folly.

But while there are some, unhappily, who not only close their eyes upon the realities of their condition, but even repel, with levity and contempt, every argument in favor of the Word of God; there are others who estimate more justly the value and importance of this subject, and who only hesitate to make a religious profession, because they have no established confidence in the truth of the Christian system. Nor in a day like ours, when infidelity abounds, and assumes the boldest front of audacity, should it be thought a shame to be troubled with doubts. The only shame is not to be troubled when we have them. For, after all, to use the words of the admirable Pascal,* "there are but two classes of mankind who can be called reasonable; those who serve God with all their heart, because they know him, and those who seek him with all their heart, because they know him not." To be sensible of our ignorance of religion, and yet to make no effort to be informed—to be sensible that Christianity may be true, and yet to sit down, in utter scorn and gaiety, to take part with its revilers—this is indeed the height of mad absurdity. The Christian is bound to pity and pray for such deluded minds; but to argue with them

---

* Pensées de Pascal, tome II. p. 20.

is useless. It is only for the willing—the rational enquirer, who is ready to approach the subject with fairness and candor, that we enter upon a series of discourses designed to shew the evidences of our faith. To such, we know that the proof must be found ample and conclusive; or, if not, the defect will rest on our incapacity to do it the justice it deserves.

We would not have it supposed, however, that none but those who doubt are interested in such a discussion. The truth of our holy religion should be deeply investigated by every established disciple of the Cross. For how, my Christian brethren, can you give 'an answer to every man of the reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear,' unless you know the arguments on which we rest the truth of the system? How can you answer the cavils of the unbeliever, in case you should be exposed to his attacks; or how can you be sure of keeping your own faith uninjured, if you have no knowledge of the proofs which so abundantly establish the certainty of the Gospel? To you, therefore, who are Christians, as well as to those who may have doubts which they are willing to abandon on sufficient proof, we design to address our present undertaking; relying on the blessing of the God of truth, who can alone enable us effectually to exhibit, or you to receive, the Gospel of salvation.

Let it not be imagined, however, an easy thing, or a matter of course, that the disposition of candor and fairness which the evidences of our religion demand, will therefore be exercised. True, it is easy to promise candor. It is easy to profess a readiness to believe. It is easy to say, 'I wish that I could believe.' But yet with all this, let it be distinctly understood, that

the want of an honest desire to be convinced is the only serious obstacle in the way of conviction. 'With the heart,' saith our text, 'man believeth unto righteousness;' and without the heart, that is, without a sincere inclination towards the truth, is it not plain that conviction must be impossible?

It may be said, indeed, that this is demanding the operation of a previous prejudice in favour of religion; whereas all that ought to be asked, is a fair neutrality in the mind. But a very slight reflection will shew the error of this position. In point of fact, we know that nothing is expected to be learned by a scholar, until he desires to learn. The inclination to knowledge is indispensable, in all the branches of human education. Why, then, should not the knowledge of religious truth require the same? And we know, further, that an entire neutrality upon the subject of Christianity, never did exist, and never can. There is not a heart in this assembly, nor in any other, which does not feel a secret bias, either for or against it. And this secret bias, when unfriendly—this actual unwillingness to be convinced—this voluntary hostility to the truth,—is what really stands in the way of conviction. It is a familiar fact in law, in government, in politics, and in science, that argument never produces its proper effect on a prejudiced mind. And, of course, religion is not peculiar in her claims on our disposition to believe. She only demands what every thing demands—an inclination to do her justice. Christianity does not profess to satisfy the stubborn and contradictory humor of wilful opposition. The seed of divine truth is not expected to take abiding root in any but an honest and good heart; that is, a heart which inclines to the truth

of God, with a feeling of kindliness and sincerity. The proud intellect of self-conceit, the arrogant temper of disputation, must be subdued to the disposition of docility and meekness, before it is possible, in the nature of things, to learn even the wisdom of earth—much less, the wisdom of heaven.

To you then, my brethren, who believe, and who listen for the sake of defending and establishing, more firmly, the truth which you already love; and to you, my friends, if any such be present, who, though you believe not, are yet willing to believe, and disposed to receive, with favor and kindness, the evidence of the truth of heaven; we address this preliminary discourse on the subject; humbly beseeching the Father of lights to guide the minds, both of the preacher and the hearers, so as to confirm and settle you in the knowledge of eternal life and joy.

Religion, as we shall all agree, imports the acknowledgment of the being of God, and the establishment of such relations between him and us, as shall promise, on his part, the power and goodness necessary to sustain and preserve us in this life, and finally make us happy in another world; and, secure on our part, the consequent duties of reverence and love, of worship and devotion. This general description applies to all religions. Whether God is believed to be but one, or many beings; whether his will is declared in books, or whether it rests upon remote tradition; whether his service is considered to be reasonable, free, and holy, or whether it is celebrated, as among the heathen, by obscenity, and cruelty, and blood; still, these general ideas belong to all; and each, alike, calls upon mankind to confess its truth, and pursue its dictates.

But among these various systems of religion, there are only two, with the rise and establishment of which we are acquainted, and the history of which is clearly written in volumes that are within the reach of all. The Christian system is the one, the Mahometan is the other. They are the only two, which agree in the acknowledgment of one living and true God; which are free from the horrors and absurdities of heathen idolatry and superstition; and which place the obedience of the worshipper in acts of faith, and duties of benevolent morality. Of these two, however, Christianity is the elder by six hundred years. The Koran of Mahomet is full of passages borrowed from the Bible. Nay, he acknowledges Jesus to be a great prophet, inspired and strengthened by the Holy Ghost; so that many have regarded his system as a corrupted Christianity, rather than a distinct religion. Without pausing, however, to examine this position, let us briefly compare the strength of their respective claims. And first, we see the New Testament recorded by eight independent writers, who were disinterested in the question; whereas Mahomet is his own historian. Besides this, Christianity rests its claims on the foundation of miracles and prophecy; whereas Mahometanism expressly disclaims all public miracles, and has no prophecies except what are evidently borrowed from the book of God. Still further, Christianity was established by men who laid down their lives in proof of their sincerity, and suffered the loss of all things, even during life, for the sake of propagating its truth; whereas Mahomet served his own earthly interest by his system, and made it the instrument of his exaltation to the pinnacle of ambition. Once more, Christianity

spread in the face of worldly opposition, although its only weapons were truth, and peace, and unresisting meekness; but Mahometanism was planted in strife and fierce contention, and its triumph was established in blood. Between these two religions, therefore, there cannot be, and there never was, the slightest hesitation, in an impartial and a rational mind. Between Mahometanism, indeed, and Paganism, there would be as little question, that the system of Mahomet was more likely to be the truth, than the dreadful and atrocious absurdities of heathen idolatry. Consequently, it might not be difficult to account for the rapid and extensive conquests of this system, amongst the dark superstitions of the East. But in a comparison with Christianity, the decision of the mind is instantaneous against the impostor of Mecca. There cannot be the balancing of a moment between them. It may truly be convenient for the man who will have no religion, to confound their respective claims; but no reflecting intellect ever paused in its choice. No infidel ever rejected the Bible, in order to adopt the Koran. No Christian people ever gave up their faith, in homage to the truth or evidence of the Mahometan. Fear and despotism have made their outward proselytes unquestionably, but the poor Greeks have shewn how ineffectual was the contest of Mahomet against the faith of Christ, although centuries of oppression and ignorance have borne, with all their accumulated force, upon their allegiance to the Gospel.

The inference, therefore, which we wish to establish in this first step of our argument, is one which, we presume, can give no mind any trouble. If Mahometanism be so entirely superior to heathenism, by

reason of its being freed from idolatry, and obscenity, and human sacrifices, and cruelties without end; while yet all its purity and excellence are drawn from the Bible, and its pretensions cannot bear one moment's comparison with the proofs of the Christian system; then it results that our choice must be between the Christian religion and none. The God of the Scriptures must be the true God, or we have no Deity. The Scriptures must be a revelation from him, or we have no revelation. The proof which Christianity affords, of the immortality of the soul, of a future judgment, of the happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked, must be sufficient and complete, or we have no proof whatever in relation to these most important of all subjects. The light of Christianity must be the true light, or all is darkness; and not one ray of hope is left to cheer the miseries of earth, or dissipate the awful horrors of the tomb.

It may be denied, however, that this is the necessary consequence. It may be said, that our rejection of Christianity will still leave us the religion of nature, and that reason dictates as much upon the subject, as it is necessary for man to know. Let us, therefore, consider this branch of the alternative, and ask what this religion of nature means.

Does it mean the religion which men, in a state of nature, adopt? Does it mean the religion of the uncivilized barbarian? Assuredly not; for this would lead, at once, to all the cruel absurdities of heathenism. Does it mean the religion which reason suggests, without any instruction or guide, beyond the exercise of its own innate powers? If so, then it would be, strictly, no religion whatever. There have been some

cases, though few, where men have come to years of maturity, without any communication with their fellow beings ; and, in every instance, they were found, not only destitute of any thing like religion, but apparently destitute of language, and degraded to a condition scarcely above the brutes. A far more extensive set of observations in the case of the deaf and dumb, have established the fact, that there is no spontaneous religion—no idea of the being of a God, of a future state, or any other religious doctrine, in the mind of man, until he is instructed. And this conclusion, settled as it is, on careful enquiry, and unopposed by a single instance on the other side, ought to put down the phrase 'religion of nature,' as an utter absurdity. The truth is, that there is no such thing.

But perhaps the kind of religion which the objector would embrace, is that which the philosophers of ancient or modern times have promulgated ; and if so, our next question would be, how he would make his choice ? Some of the ancient philosophers believed in many gods ; some thought there was none ; and others, that there were gods, but that it was beneath their dignity to take any notice of human affairs. And amongst the moderns, the same variety of sentiment exists. Some have been actual Atheists, as Spinoza and Mirabeau. Some have been Deists, as Herbert, Rousseau, Volney, Hume, and many others. Some teach that there is no difference between vice and virtue, that there is no future state, and that this life is the whole of our existence. Others believe that the soul is immortal, and that there is a judgment to come, but only because it seems to them a more reasonable belief than the opposite. All agree in vilifying the Bible

in some way or other, although some of them praise its morality and its sublimity in the warmest terms; but no one pretends to give any proof that his system is the true one, beyond the arguments of his own reason. Now, if our objector designs to cast off Christianity, in order to take his notions of religion from the philosophic school, we ask, which of them he will select, and on what principles he will make the selection? They all agree in pulling down the Christian system, but they differ, egregiously, in the structure which they would build upon its ruins. They all deny that our proofs are sufficient, and then modestly ask us to adopt their notions, without any proof whatever. They scorn the evidence of miracle and prophecy, and talk about the superior claims of reason; but the reason of one proves that there is a God, and the reason of another proves that there is none. The reason of a third establishes the immortality of the soul, and the reason of a fourth laughs at it, as an absurd superstition. Where is the guide—where the teacher, upon whose system the heart and understanding of a searcher after truth can repose with security? Alas! bewildered and lost must be the mind, that attempts to follow the mazes of extravagance and impiety, set before him by the infidel philosophers of the world. Many of them were men of splendid talents, commanding eloquence, and extensive learning; but the pride of intellect, and the thirst after fame misled them. They lost the docility and candor so necessary to every searcher after truth; and instead of being friends to the happiness, the morality, and the eternal welfare of their fellows, they spread around them the infection of a moral pestilence, and scattered the flowers of genius upon the path of ruin and despair.

We repeat, therefore, my brethren, that the choice we have to make in this matter, is between the religion of the Scriptures, and none. There is no religion of nature. This is but a delusive title, given by men to systems of their own devising; in which the little good they contained, was stolen from the Bible; but put together, after their own fancy, without a shadow of proof or authority. The philosophers who have distinguished themselves in this way, differed among themselves; and their notions were utterly useless to direct the conduct, to guide the aims, to restrain the passions, or to console the hearts of men. Who ever saw a congregation of Deists established in the worship of the God whom they pretended to acknowledge? Who ever saw the family of a Deist gathered together, to unite with him in praise and prayer? Who ever heard that the belief of a Deist had power to assuage the pains of a dying bed, and enable the spirit to depart in the confidence of hope and joy? Oh no! my brethren; it is only the religion of Christ, which possesses those characters of true conviction. It is only the Gospel of Christ which can purify and strengthen the soul. Other systems may amuse the fancy, but this alone can take hold of the affections and the will. The religion of the Deist may engage the intellect, but it is only the religion of the Bible that can warm the heart.

May you be enabled, then, to enter upon the investigation of the evidences of our sacred faith, with a ready and a willing mind, animated by an honest love of truth, and freed from the blinding influence of prejudice and passion. And may you, my Christian friends and brethren, rejoice in the reflection, that you are in

possession of such inestimable privileges, as are set before us in the Word of God. While so many are sitting in the thick gloom of heathen superstition, what a blessing should we not esteem it to have the light of life! While so many are wandering after the wild-fire of false philosophy, what a blessing is it to behold the Sun of Righteousness, the glory of God, in the face of the Redeemer! O! let us magnify, with one accord, the mercy and the grace which have led us to the knowledge of the truth; and while, 'with our hearts, we believe unto righteousness,' let us 'make confession unto salvation,' 'not only with our lips, but in our lives,' by giving ourselves up unto the service of the Saviour, and living 'righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world.'

DISCOURSE II.

JOHN, XX. 30, 31.

AND MANY OTHER SIGNS TRULY DID JESUS IN THE PRESENCE OF HIS DISCIPLES, WHICH ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK, BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD; AND THAT BELIEVING, YE MIGHT HAVE LIFE IN HIS NAME.

WE are to enter, in the present discourse, my brethren, upon the first topic of the evidences of Christianity, viz. the authenticity of the New Testament Scriptures, in which are included all those doctrines of the faith, comprehensively called the Gospel. In the language of the text, these books were written, not for the gratification of literary taste or ambition, nor yet to be a record of passing events, for the sake of ministering to public curiosity or national pride. None of the common motives of authorship are assigned for their production. No, my brethren, they were written that we might believe in Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, we might have life in his name. If the motive for writing these Scriptures were thus exalted and peculiar,—if our life—our eternal life, be dependent on their truth, with how deep and lively an interest should we attend to the establishment of their claims. For creatures such as we are—standing continually on

the verge of the unseen world, and, within the compass of each little week, beholding some relative, or friend, or neighbor, departing to his final home ;—called, day by day, to perform the last sad offices to those we loved ; and without one ray of hope, either for them, or for ourselves, other than that which beams from the light of the Gospel—O ! how precious should be the truth which assures us, that there is life and happiness beyond the grave ;—that the spirits, whose heavenly-mindedness shed an atmosphere of purity and gentleness around them, while on earth, are still solicitous for our welfare, and waiting for our coming in the Paradise of God ;—that the countenances on which we have so often gazed with fondness and delight, will again meet our eyes in the lustre of immortality ;—that the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed,—yes, changed into the blessed likeness of the Son of God, and made partakers of celestial bliss, in the world of boundless joy and glory.

But alas ! we live with continual cause to mourn over the blindness and unbelief, the indifference and hardness of heart, which lead men to reject this very Gospel, to put away from them this very assurance of the highest mercy, which the love of the Redeemer could grant to our sinful race. They object, and cavil, and dispute, upon the very existence of our revelation. They deny the truth of the sacred history. They assert that the Bible is not what it purports to be ; but that it is a fabrication, imposed upon mankind by the artifices of the priesthood. And thus, it becomes our duty to defend the first principles of the faith, to shew, from time to time, the absurdity and unfairness of this accu-

sation, and to demonstrate the ample sufficiency of the proofs which establish the authority of the Scriptures. Many of these men, we are well aware, are hardened, and callous to conviction, without any proper disposition of heart in favor of the truth. But others are not destitute of all sensibility. They are misled, but not hostile—they are blinded, but they are not unwilling to see the light. For such as these, my Christian brethren, our prayers and efforts ought to be constant, that they may come to the knowledge of the only Saviour. For the sake, too, of the young enquirers, who look to us, more especially, for instruction, and even for the sake of arming our own belief against the assaults of infidelity,—for all these reasons, ought we not to enter upon the subject, with willing and with serious minds? May the Spirit of Truth grant us his presence and his blessing, that we may speak and hear, as those who labor for eternity.

The single question to which we shall ask your attention, in the present discourse, is the fundamental enquiry as to the authorship of the New Testament. It might, indeed, be supposed more satisfactory, to commence our proof where the Bible commences its history. A little reflection, however, will shew that the course proposed, is not only more direct, but more conclusive; because the truth of the Old Testament does not necessarily include the truth of the New,—an assertion plainly proved by the Jews, who believe the Old Testament, while they deny the Redeemer. But the truth of the New Testament does necessarily include the truth of the Old, because our Lord and his Apostles constantly refer to the books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, as to the Scriptures of

truth—the Oracles of God—the language of inspiration, from which not one jot or tittle should in anywise pass away, until all be fulfilled. Of course, the evidence which establishes the New Testament, establishes the whole Bible, and of this evidence, the question of authenticity is the first branch.

Now the New Testament consists of twenty-seven separate books, published originally in different places and at different times, by no less than eight different authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude. Being all original preachers of the Gospel, eyewitnesses, workers of miracles, and held in entire reverence by the first Churches of Christ, their several works were bound up together, and considered equal in point of authority; and, since that time, the whole is regarded as one book. But it must be remembered, that, in reality, here are eight independent witnesses, all true, or all false;—their books are all genuine, or all forged; and therefore, the number of these testimonies ought, in reason, to have its proper influence upon the question.

The unbeliever hesitates not to say, that the whole is a fabrication—a base imposture. He thinks it the interest of the priesthood to invent such a system, and palm it on the people; and imagines that such was, in point of fact, the mode of its introduction. And, forgetting the maxim of justice, that fraud is in no case to be presumed, but proved, he boldly casts on us the burden of evidence, and challenges the Christian Church to demonstrate that the books of the New Testament were written by the men whose names they bear, and at the time alleged in the sacred history.

It might be enough, in answer to such a requisition,

to reply, that the authorship of the Christian Scriptures was not disputed until the rise of modern infidelity; that the primitive Church, who alone had the opportunity of knowing the fact, settled it with universal consent; and that the canon of the New Testament had enjoyed the quiet prescription of fifteen hundred years, before the reckless hardihood of the last century presumed to raise the question. But we are willing to examine the point upon its merits, without claiming the benefit of this prescription; and we shall have no difficulty in proving the authorship of these sacred books, by the very same evidences that infidelity itself admits to be conclusive in every similar enquiry.

We begin by asking the unbeliever whether he has any ancient books, the authors of which are handed down to our own time, without any serious dispute or cavil? And to this enquiry it must be answered,—Yes, several,—the poems of Homer, the histories of Herodtus and Thucydides, the works of Xenophon, Lucian, Plutarch, Epictetus, and others of the Greeks, Cicero and Cæsar, Virgil, Horace, Tacitus, Sallust, Pliny, and many others of the Latins, some of them long before, some at the same period, and some a very little after the dates of the books of the New Testament. We ask how the objector knows that these classic works were written by the authors whose names they bear? The answer is,—Because they have been handed down to us, from that time, without any contradiction or dispute, as the works of these men; because they are recognized and appealed to by all the other writers who have lived since their day, and by each other; because a conspiracy so extensive, in favor of a literary fraud, is highly improbable, not to say impossible, in its

own nature; and because, had it been possible, there was no motive of interest to induce any one to attempt it.

These are satisfactory reasons, it must be confessed, why men should receive, without hesitation, the works of classic antiquity; and hence, it is no wonder, that all agree upon the sufficiency of the testimony. But now, we aver that all these reasons apply to the books of the New Testament, with far greater force, so as to render any mistake upon the subject of their authenticity absolutely impossible. And this we shall next endeavor to shew, availing oursélves of the lucid arrangement of a late admired author.*

First, then, let us trace up the Scriptures, to see the positive proof of their transmission from generation to generation. We take it for granted, that no one questions whether our present Bible is the same which was appealed to throughout Europe, at the time of the reformation in the sixteenth century, about three hundred years ago. Going back a century and a half, we ask whether it was not admitted as fully in the days of John Wicliffe, who translated it into the English tongue. We may next go another step farther back, to the time of Grosseteste, the celebrated opponent of Pope Innocent III., in A. D. 1240, or to the days of Anselm, Bishop of Canterbury, under William Rufus, who wrote a treatise against those that derided the inspiration of the Scriptures; and we demand, were not the same books universally acknowledged then?

From this, let us go back a little farther, to the time of Alfred the Great, who founded or restored the

---

* Rev. Daniel Wilson, now Bishop of Calcutta.

famous University of Oxford, and translated the Scriptures into Saxon, for the general use of his subjects. This brings us to the ninth century.

The next step in the track of antiquity will take us to the time of the venerable Bede, born in A. D. 672, whose fame filled the whole Christian world, and who, among other works of high reputation, wrote comments on the Epistles of St. Paul.

The next brings us to the days of Gregory the Great, in A. D. 590, who sent Augustine and his companions to England, in order to convert the inhabitants. In the same century, the sacred books were received by many Christian Churches, on the Continent of Europe, through Gregory, Theodoret, and Fulgentius. Then we have the testimony of St. Austin, Jerome, and Chrysostom, in the fifth century; of St. Ambrose, Athanasius, and Eusebius, in the fourth; of Cyprian, Origen, and Tertullian, in the third; and of Irenæus in the second century, who was the disciple of Polycarp, the pupil of St. John, the Apostle.

Here, then, is an unbroken chain of testimony, shewing how the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles were handed down, from the very period of their publication, to our own day. But having thus traced them by going back to the period of antiquity, let us now reverse the order of remark, for the sake of shewing another view of the evidence, in some respects more precise and satisfactory.

It is manifest, that on the first publication of the twenty-seven books composing the New Testament, all the Churches would not receive them at once. The art of printing being then unknown, it would require time to propagate them and multiply copies, so that

the Fathers of the first age, who were coeval with the Apostles, could not be expected to have the whole collection completed and arranged as we see them now.

Accordingly, we see that the references made by the six Apostolical Fathers, in their writings, are less formal and precise than afterwards, because the language of the New Testament Scriptures had not yet become a part of education. Their testimony is incidental, given in simplicity for practical purposes; and yet the quotations and allusions in these six writers, amount to more than two hundred and twenty, and recognize nineteen or twenty of the sacred books.

But in the second century, the evidence is more express and full; for adversaries and heretics, enemies from without and domestic foes within, gave occasion for much discussion. The quotations now become so numerous, that a large part of the New Testament might be compiled from them. In the apology of Justin Martyr, (born A. D. 89, died 164,) there are about two hundred. In Irenæus (A. D. 97—202) there are more and larger quotations from the small volume of the New Testament, than of all the works of Cicero, though of such uncommon excellence for thought and style, in the writers of all characters for several ages.* The list of quotations, in Tertullian alone, occupies nearly thirty folio pages. In this age, also, the public reading of the Scriptures in the Churches became general; they were collected into volumes, and translations of them were made into Latin and Syriac.

---

* Lardner.

From the third and fourth centuries, more than a hundred authors have reached us, who bear witness to the sacred books. Catalogues of them were now made out, translations of them multiplied, and commentaries were composed. Public libraries were devoted to the preservation of copies, and councils of hundreds of Bishops recognized their authority.

To shew the affection and esteem in which they were held, we may mention a few facts. In the persecution of A. D. 303, one of the most affecting sights was to see the sacred Scriptures burned in the market places. The martyrs were asked if they had any divine books or parchments. They replied, We have, but we will not give them up; it is better for us to be consumed with fire, than to give up the Holy Scriptures.

It is related of the Emperor Constantine, who was converted A. D. 312, that he had a kind of Church in his palace, where, taking the sacred books into his own hands, he attentively read and meditated upon them, before the whole assembly of his courtiers. On one occasion, this Emperor writes thus to Eusebius, the ecclesiastical historian. "The city that bears our name, (Constantinople,) through the goodness of Providence, increases daily; and there will be occasion for erecting in it more Churches. Wherefore we hope you will approve of our design, and take care to procure fifty copies of the Divine Scriptures, which you know to be necessary in Churches, of fine parchment, legible and easily portable, that they may be the fitter for use, transcribed by such as are skilful." This same Emperor summoned the famous council of Nice, where three hundred and eighteen Bishops,

besides innumerable presbyters, deacons, and others, were called to determine concerning the Arian heresy. The Emperor (says Theodoret) recommended them to decide all things by the Scriptures.—It is a pity, he said, that now, when their enemies were subdued, they should differ among themselves, especially when they had the doctrine of the Holy Ghost in writing.

But this, it may be said, is the testimony of friends. Let us then turn to the fact, that the bitterest enemies of Christianity, in the primitive days, acknowledged the genuineness of the Gospel history. Thus Celsus, the heathen philosopher, A. D. 175, advances all imaginable objections against the faith, with much ingenuity and scorn. But he never questions the authenticity of the sacred books. He never doubts that they were written by the men whose names they bear. Had the least cloud of uncertainty rested upon them, at that early period, what a triumphant argument would it not have afforded him.

In the third century, Porphyry appeared, an able and determined adversary of our religion. Yet he, too, admitted the books; and it is well remarked, that this admission is the more important, because he shewed a disposition to reject them if he could, by actually denying the authenticity of the prophecy of Daniel. To none of the books of the New Testament, however did he make any objection, so far as their authenticity was concerned.

Lastly, in the fourth century, Julian, the apostate Emperor of Rome, attacks the religion of the Gospel with all his power. But neither does he venture to call in question the truth of the Scriptures, nor charge the Christian priesthood with imposing false books

upon the world. So far from it, that he even allows the principal facts of the gospel histories, and argues upon them, as the admitted works of the Apostles and followers of the Redeemer.

Where, then, is the defect of proof on this branch of our subject—when, from the very age in which the Apostles wrote, the testimony of friends and foes alike establishes the fact, that these were their writings? What is all the evidence of all the classic authors together, in comparison with the force of this, especially when the importance of the point itself, in the opinion of the early Christians, is taken into consideration?

For let us only weigh, for one moment, the interest attached to the authenticity of a poet or historian, with that which invested the Oracles of God. Whether Homer, or Virgil, or Herodotus, or Sallust, or Xenophon, or Cæsar, were, in truth, the authors of the books which were received under their names, was a question of small consequence indeed. There was no system of faith, no relinquishment of property, no exposure to persecution, involved in the enquiry. But not so with the Scriptures. These books taught doctrines which overset all the existing notions and practices of mankind. They commanded the open warfare of the disciple of the Cross, against the false gods which were universally adored, throughout the whole Greek and Roman empire. They separated the believer from father and mother, sister and brother, kindred and home. The faith of Christ led his disciples to imprisonment, drove them into banishment, or bound them for the slaughter. And would they not, then, look narrowly into these Scriptures? Would

they make such sacrifices on the authority of books, on which a single doubt could hang? But again, let us ask how any man, or set of men, could have imposed upon them, books written under the names of the Apostles? For instance, St. Paul writes two epistles to the congregation of Corinth. Would any one have dared to forge these epistles while the Apostle was yet alive? And after his death, how should such epistles have been palmed upon these congregations, when every individual belonging to them could have said, that they never heard of them before?

Lastly, let it be noted that the character and style of these Scriptures preclude the possibility of such an imposition. They are not a history of ancient things, which took place during far distant ages, and in which errors might be inserted without detection or danger. But they are addressed to eyewitnesses; they speak of what had just happened; they appeal to those who were as deeply concerned as the writers themselves, in the truths related; who could not have been deceived, and who would not have tolerated the slightest attempt at imposition, where the interests of their souls and bodies were concerned so deeply. From the whole, therefore, we may draw this irresistible conclusion, that any mistake as to the real authors of those New Testament Scriptures was impossible;—that these twenty-seven books were certainly written by the eight men whose names they bear, and could not have been imposed upon the primitive Churches by any management whatever.

Many collateral arguments might be presented, my brethren, on this point of authorship, in reply to the

shallow and absurd allegation of modern unbelievers, that the books themselves are a forgery of the priesthood:—an allegation, by the way, which they do not even attempt to prove. But, persuaded as we are, that those who are not convinced by the facts already detailed, must labor under difficulties of the heart, rather than of the head;—and desirous not to detain you too long on this branch of the subject, we shall rest it here, and take it for granted in our future discourses, because sufficiently proved, that the books of the New Testament were actually written by the ostensible authors, and published at the times and in the manner set forth in their contents. Our next discourse will be directed to the truth of the facts related in those books, so as to ascertain whether it was possible for the authors to have been deceived, or to have borne false witness. And we think that no human intellect can desire a stronger demonstration than belongs to that question, if we are only enabled to do it common justice.

But after all, my brethren, let us remember, that we gain nothing by admitting the authenticity or even the truth of the Scriptures, if we do no more. These things were written that we might believe in Christ, not with the cold assent of the understanding merely, not with the external homage of the lip, not even with the full formality of an outward profession, but with the inward affections of the soul. Thus only, can our belief profit us—thus only can we have life in his name. These Scriptures must be transcribed into our motives, our feelings, our words, our actions;—for 'if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,' and 'without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.'

Let the unbeliever, then, if he will,—continue to object and cavil, though in the face of a stronger body of testimony, than any book on the face of the earth, besides the Scriptures, can claim. Let him, if he will,—continue to cry out, 'Fraud and imposition,' without a shadow of reason, and under circumstances where imposture was utterly impossible. Let him turn to the authors of heathen antiquity with entire faith, and vilify that blessed volume, which is a thousand fold more worthy of his confidence. But let us take heed, that we furnish him with no ground for cavil by our inconsistency. Let us beware that the greatest stumbling block in his way, be not the ungodliness of professed disciples. And let us pity and pray for all who are in the blindness of this delusion. For what is so deplorable—what so melancholy, as to behold the unbeliever, walking downwards to the tomb, without one spark of comfort or of hope in his desolate soul. What is so awful, as to see an immortal being, trying to persuade himself that death is an eternal sleep. Or what is so worthy of supreme compassion, as to see those who do think themselves immortal, and yet cast aside the only record which establishes the fact;—those who talk of a judgment to come, and yet acknowledge not the blessed Son of God, who is the only Judge;—those who admit a future state, and yet put aside the only system of faith and practice, which can teach them what it is, and how to attain it.

But if the life of an unbeliever be thus dark and desolate, O! what is his death? Who can contemplate, without a thrill of horror, the last hours of that man, to whom the approach of dissolution brings nothing but the fearful doubts of infidelity, or the gloom of

utter despair. To plunge at once into annihilation—to leave the sympathies of affection—the breathing world—the light of heaven—the warm feelings of home and kindred—for silence, and corruption, and decay. Or to go, we know not where—to suffer, we know not what—to be cast by an unseen and mighty power, into a condition surrounded by obscurity and terror—to be conscious of a thousand sins, and not know on what terms they will be pardoned, if at all—to be hurried before the awful bar of the Supreme and Omnipotent God, without Advocate, Intercessor, or Friend,—without any authorized revelation of his will to rely on—without any acknowledged promise of mercy to plead—O! 'tis horrible to a reflecting mind or a heart of any sensibility, to think of such an hour, when the poor lost soul has shut itself out from the refuge of the Gospel.

Far different is the last end of the true believer. The spirit of the ransomed sinner contemplates death with more than submission—with placid joy. A peace which passeth understanding fills the bosom, and the ardent eye of faith seems to behold the present Saviour, sustaining the soul with the arms of divine affection, and comforting it with the promises of Almighty love. The language, the feelings, the holy exhortations, the sublime hopes of such an one—how impressive—how powerful the evidence which they afford to the truth of Christianity;—how they rivet themselves upon the memory, how they sink into the heart, and shed a delicious and thrilling solemnity of proof around the blessed promise of salvation. What are the discourses of an hundred tongues in comparison with the touching influence of the dying hour? There

is a light beaming in the countenance of the departing saint, which belongs not to earth. There is a joy within the soul which lifts it above every human care and affection. That light is an emanation from the glory of the Saviour—that joy is the foretaste of heaven!

Yes, my beloved brethren! precious, in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his Saints. And precious, to us, should be the privilege of witnessing it, in all its purity, and loveliness of character. May the Spirit of God enable us to improve aright, each additional example of the excellence and power of his Gospel, which his Providence affords us, that when our own hour shall come, we may be found 'with our loins girt, and our lights burning,' 'believing in Christ the Son of God,' and sustained by the blessed hope that we too 'shall have life in his name.'

DISCOURSE III.

LUKE, I. 2.

THEY DELIVERED THEM UNTO US, WHICH FROM THE BEGINNING WERE EYEWITNESSES AND MINISTERS OF THE WORD.

ACCORDING to the order of argument laid down, my brethren, for our series of discourses on the evidences of Christianity, we have shewn the clear ground of proof, that the twenty-seven books composing the New Testament, must have been written by the eight several authors, whose names they bear. The next topic which presents itself for our consideration, is the question, whether those men could have written such histories, if the facts recorded had not actually happened. We must remember that the authors represent themselves as eyewitnesses of what they relate. Either then, the facts did truly occur, or these witnesses were deceived, or else they were impostors. One of these three conclusions is infallibly certain. Let us see which is the correct one, according to the plain rules of right reason and common sense.

First then, let us try the question, whether the Apostles and disciples of our Lord could have been deceived; and this we shall best understand, by reflecting upon the circumstances in which they were placed, when he appeared amongst them.

It is incontrovertible, that the Jewish nation possessed the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for centuries before the coming of Christ. These Scriptures contained their laws, their history, and their religion. In them, they were taught to look for a Redeemer, whose character was portrayed distinctly by the prophets; his birth, his wondrous works, his death,—were all set forth with astonishing minuteness; and in consequence of these predictions, the Jewish people looked confidently for their Messiah, about the time when he actually came.

Thus far, the general expectation seems to have been favorable to a delusion. We grant that all men easily believe what they wish to be true; and therefore, the belief of the Apostles and first disciples that Christ was soon to come and perform wonderful works among them, might assist in producing a deception. But along with this expectation of the Messiah, we must remember that they had formed a view of his character, which totally differed from the outward claims of Jesus of Nazareth. Understanding the prophets to speak of earthly things, when they described, in such magnificent language, the glory and triumph of the Messiah's kingdom, they looked for a mighty Prince, a war-like conqueror, who should break the yoke of the Romans from their neck, and raise them to a still greater height of political eminence, than their nation had enjoyed in the days of David and Solomon. Manifestly then, although they were prepared to expect the Messiah, yet they were also prepared to see a man, as opposite as possible in his appearance and pretensions, to the humble Prophet of Galilee. By necessary consequence, the utmost incredulity towards his claims, might have

been anticipated, in the great body of the nation; since all would be disposed to deny, that the reputed son of the carpenter Joseph, a man without education, or rank, or dignity, or connexion, could possibly be the promised King of Israel, the great and glorious Messiah of God.

Under these circumstances, nevertheless, Christ calls upon them to believe in, and acknowledge him, upon the express strength of his fulfilment of prophecy, and the performance of such miracles as none but the Almighty could effect. The claim set up by him, as we might naturally expect, drew upon him the immediate observation of all men. The priests, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians,—all took an active interest in this great question; and after long and strict scrutiny into his pretensions, they divided into two classes,—those who rejected, and those who acknowledged him. But about the fact into which we are now enquiring, they all agreed; namely, that the wonderful works were actually done. No man denied that. Even the bitterest enemies of the Redeemer were forced to acknowledge, that signs and miracles had been effected by him, which they could not account for in any other way, than by attributing them to the agency of the devil. So well was this understood, that Pilate the Roman Governor, feared when he was told that his prisoner was the Son of God, instead of treating him as an impostor; and Herod himself, though his avowed enemy, yet hoped to see some miracle done by him, as soon as he found him in his power. We lay down this assertion, therefore, as indisputable, that Christ Jesus was universally admitted to be a worker of wonders, altogether beyond the

reach of man. His enemies indeed, evaded the force of the argument, by absurdly and wickedly attributing those wonders to Satan. The writers of the Gospel history rightly attributed them to God. But the facts were not to be disputed; and hence we draw our first conclusion, that in the works performed by the Saviour, there could have been no deception.

It may be objected here, however, that if the whole body of the Jews believed that our Lord actually did these miracles, they must perforce, have acknowledged his divine character and mission. But this is drawing a very positive inference, from at least very doubtful premises. We have already adverted to the great disappointment, which the Priesthood and the leading men of the nation experienced, in seeing a Messiah, poor, humble, and unpretending in his earthly condition, instead of their expected Prince and conqueror. Add to this, the extravagant ideas common in all ages, of the power of evil spirits; which led them to suppose that the instrumentality of the devil accounted sufficiently for all the miracles. Add to these two considerations, the anger and resentment kindled in their proud and selfish hearts, by the stern rebukes and reiterated charges of hypocrisy and wickedness which our Lord publicly made against them; and it is easy to see how readily they might close their eyes and ears, as they actually did, so that no works, however vast,—no doctrine, however pure,—no life, however holy,—should command their confidence, or subdue their wilful and stubborn opposition.

But there is another, and very obvious reason, why the Apostles could not have been deceived, derived from the quality of the works done by the Redeemer.

He read their thoughts; he cast out evil spirits; he restored the blind, the lame, the deaf; he healed the palsy and the leprosy; the most terrific cases of madness and insanity were completely cured; and all this in multitudes, without a single failure, by a word, or a touch. How could there be deception here? An instance or two may now and then occur, where marvellous cures are said to have been effected by the force of imagination, in certain diseases. But to do this for years,—publicly,—on crowds,—to do it in cases which are so totally beyond the reach of human means, and so totally independent of the power of imagination, as the palsy,—the leprosy,—the withered arm,—the raving lunatic,—the born blind;—such a deception may be safely pronounced totally impossible in its own nature.

But even if imposture had been practicable in this class of our Saviour's miracles, what shall be said of his twice feeding many thousands, with a few loaves and fishes, and having baskets full of fragments remaining after the multitudes had been filled? What shall be said of his walking on the waves in presence of all the Apostles, and enabling Peter to do the same, until his faith began to fail? What shall be said of his rebuking the raging storm, and saying to the furious billows, 'Peace be still'—when all his disciples in the ship with him, heard the high command, and saw the immediate calm that followed it? What shall be said of his calling the dead to life? first the daughter of Jairus, then the widow's son, whom they were carrying out of the gate of the city in open day, and thirdly, Lazarus, before a crowd of witnesses, when he had already lain four days in the grave, bound hand

and foot, covered with a stone, and even dissolving in decay ?, How is it possible to think that the Evangelists and Apostles could have been deceived into the opinion that such wonders had been effected ? They were slow of belief,—disposed to doubt,—by no means easily persuaded. Their Master was surrounded by spies who observed his every action with jealousy and dislike ; and utterly inconceivable is it, that his disciples could ever have been persuaded to credit these marvellous works, if the least imaginable shade of suspicion could have attached to them.

Let it, however, be recollected in the next place, that there was no motive for such a deception, even had it been possible. What had our Lord to gain by imposition ? What did he promise himself ? Did he desire to take advantage of the first enthusiasm which his wonderful works excited among the people ? So far from it, that when they sought to take him by force and make him a king, he hid himself to avoid it. Nay, he expressly and repeatedly told his followers, that he was to be given up to the Gentiles, and to be spitefully entreated and crucified. While he lived, he voluntarily endured persecution and want. The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay his head : and the time was at hand, when he expected to lay down his life for our ruined world, according to his own express prediction. For what, then, should he deceive, even had it been possible ? And was there ever a supposition so monstrous as this, that a Being such as Christ, should have taught and lived on such a system of purity, and benevolence, and voluntary humiliation, and have closed his career with the agonies of such a martyrdom, and

yet have desired to deceive the little band of followers who adhered to him.

There is one consideration more, belonging to this branch of our subject. It is this. Even if it were possible that our Lord could have imposed upon the Apostles and Evangelists, by pretending to perform these stupendous and public miracles, without the power,—even if it were possible that he would have done so, for the avowed purpose of being a persecuted wanderer whilst living, and of ending his days as a malefactor upon the Cross,—yet here, at least, his deception must have ceased. A dead man cannot deceive the most credulous. What, then, shall we say, when the moment of his death displayed the greatest wonder of all? When the sun grew black, and the rocks rent, and there was a great earthquake, and many bodies of the dead arose and appeared unto many,—when the heathen centurion himself, exclaimed, in the terror of conviction, 'Truly this was the Son of God!' What, above all, shall we say, when we find these same Evangelists and Apostles, with five hundred brethren of whom St. Paul speaks, convinced against their will, that their Master had risen from the dead the third day, according to his own prediction,—had taught them, on several occasions, during forty days, and had then openly, in sight of them all, ascended up into heaven? These wonders, exhibited after his death, destroy all the force of the objection to the miracles exhibited during his life-time; and the whole, taken together, amounts to a stronger demonstration than any other question of evidence ever claimed, that the Evangelists and Apostles could not have been deceived, as to the facts of

their histories,—that any imposture, practised on them, must have been totally and absolutely impossible.

But then, the unbeliever adopts the other branch of opposition. These men, if not deceived, were perhaps deceivers. If they were not imposed upon, yet they may have been impostors. Let us now try this allegation, in the same way and on the same principles.

In the Gospel histories, it is recorded by four distinct authors, that Christ conferred a certain portion of miraculous power upon his Apostles, during his life time, and promised that they should do works like his own, after his decease. And after his death and resurrection, and just before his ascension into heaven, he is stated to have directed that they should tarry at Jerusalem, until they should be endued with power from on high. Then, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, we have a detailed account of the first display of the Apostles' miraculous gifts on the day of Pentecost, when they all spake in languages which they had never learned, and a vast concourse of Jews and strangers assembled and listened in perfect astonishment, and the result of that one day's display was the conversion of three thousand souls!

But this is not all. The Apostles now boldly announce the truth of Christ's character and resurrection. They claim and exercise the same miraculous powers. Peter and Paul each restore the dead to life. They all heal diseases, expel evil spirits, and confer the gift of tongues and prophecy on others, by laying on of their hands. In all the Epistles of St. Paul, addressed to the various Churches, he adverts to those miraculous powers, calls them the signs of his Apostleship, and appeals to these thousands of believers as witnes-

ses of his truth. St. Peter's Epistles recognize and confirm St. Paul's, and also furnish an independent evidence of the same system. And how, we ask, could deception, under such circumstances, have been possible? The powers claimed by the Apostles were miraculous, public, and manifest;—they were of a nature which precluded the slightest hope of deception;—and they were surrounded by enemies full of hatred and distrust: and yet it was by these very miracles that they produced conviction upon thousands, formed congregations in Judea and amongst the Gentiles, and succeeded, in spite of the bitterest opposition. How could these men have thus succeeded, if they were deficient in honesty and truth; if, in point of fact, the powers which they professed to exercise, were falsely assumed for the purpose of imposture?

But, in the second place, even granting that it had been possible for the Apostles to deceive the thousands whom they converted to the faith of the Gospel, for what earthly inducement should they have attempted it? They all knew what the fate of their Master had been. They all knew that he promised them nothing, in this world, but hatred and persecution. They all looked forward to suffering, and shame, and final martyrdom. In the very infancy of the Church at Jerusalem, St. Stephen was stoned—St. Peter was imprisoned and beaten—St. James was slain by Herod. St. Paul relates a specimen of the general lot, when he writes to the Corinthians, that the Apostles were made the offscouring of all things, despised, defamed, and, so far as the present life was concerned, of all men most miserable. 'Of the Jews,' saith he, 'five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten

with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep, in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.' The same Apostle, as we know from ecclesiastical history, was beheaded,—St. Peter was crucified with his head downwards,—St. John was thrown into a caldron of boiling oil. What inducement had these men to persevere in a course of imposture, which brought them such earthly rewards as these? The idea truly, seems to us the very height of absurdity, that twelve men could be found, devoting themselves to the honor and glory of a crucified malefactor,—willingly exposing themselves to every danger and to the bitterest sufferings, and promising themselves nothing better than persecution and martyrdom,—sacrificing ease, quiet, kindred, home,—and all this, for more than thirty years together, simply for the sake of deceiving mankind. Surely those who can believe that the Apostles were impostors, must possess an hundred fold more credulity, than the faith of the Christian demands.

Yet this is not the whole of the difficulty, with which the unbeliever must contend. It remains to be shewn, how the thousands of Judea, and the tens of thousands in Asia Minor and in Rome, could be prevailed on to embrace the Gospel of Christ, if the Apostles had not actually manifested the miraculous powers which they claimed. What else but the exhi-

bition of such powers, could have enabled a little company of ignorant, uncultivated men, to convert multitudes, and that, too, at the peril of their own safety? For every disciple was in danger of persecution, as well as the Apostles themselves. Banishment, imprisonment, scourging, and death, were the common lot of all, during the ten persecutions which occurred before the end of the third century. Every prejudice of education, every tie of family affection, every motive of earthly interest, stood opposed to the adoption of the Christian name at that day. And yet the faith of Christ succeeded, and prospered, and grew, in spite of every obstacle. What but the firmest persuasion, the fullest knowledge of its truth and power, could have strengthened and established the first professors of the system? What but the entire accordanee of the acts done, with the extraordinary powers claimed by the Apostles, could have invested a few illiterate fishermen with such abiding influence over the souls and bodies of mankind?

In the last place, we advert to a circumstance which seems to us decisive with every mind of feeling and of candor. We have shewn that the Apostles could not have been deceived, by any possibility. Of course then, they must have been deceivers, or else their testimony was true. We have shewn that the nature of their claims was inconsistent with the possibility of imposition, and that every motive of interest, comfort, credit, and safety, combined to prevent the attempt at imposition, even had it been possible. But now we ask, were they such men as were likely to have derived any gratification from such an attempt? Crimes never go alone. Vices, like virtues, are commonly

found in company. What was there in the doctrine or conduct of these men, that looked like a love of fraud or deception? Was there ever framed, by the hand of mortal, such a pure, benevolent, candid, upright, peaceful, heavenly system of morality, as that which stands connected with the Gospel? Was there ever a company of men, who gave themselves up, with such unsparing self-devotion, to the teaching of virtue, as the Apostles of Christ? Was there ever a society of human beings, of any rank or condition, more clear from the slighest imputation on their moral character, or more unwearied in the establishment of truth, justice, temperance, holiness, and charity, than they? And how then can they be suspected of desiring to deceive, even if they had the power? How can any one bear to fasten on such men, these foul and base imputations, without a shadow of plausible cause for suspicion? And where shall we look for truth, if not in the solemn declarations of men, whom every consideration in heaven and on earth,—every motive before God and man—every argument of interest here, and of hope hereafter—every circumstance of ability and means, of opportunity and power, of principle and inclination,—alike pronounce incapable of desiring, and utterly unable to have executed, such an imposition.

It is in vain that the unbeliever tries to escape from the conclusion, by vague and general declamations about the fallibility of human testimony. It is true, that human testimony is fallible; and yet, the whole of life is guided by it as certainly as if it were infallible, under proper circumstances. The administration of justice, the acts of government, the declarations of

war, the restorations of peace, the voyages of the merchant, the experiments of philosophy, the progress of art and science, in a word, every thing on earth, is guided by human testimony; and, instead of the general experience of mankind proving that human testimony deceives, the direct contrary is the fact. Human testimony rarely deceives, unless when distorted by prejudice, by passion, or by interest; and never, since the earliest history of man, was there a case so fully exempted from such influence, as that of the Apostles.

Neither does it bear upon the present question, that there have been many instances of false miracles, such as those met with in the history of heathenism, and the pious frauds of the Church of Rome. True, there are such instances; but here is the distinction. The wonders recorded in heathenism, were not the PROOFS of the system. They were never appealed to, as the evidence of a divine revelation. Nor in the case of the miracles so plentifully claimed by the Church of Rome, is there any connexion between them and the establishment of a new religion. None of their saints comes forward with the holy confidence of an Apostle, appealing to the congregations which he had converted, for the truth of his miraculous powers. These miracles, like those of the heathen, came in long after the religion was settled. They were open to every possible ground of suspicion. No man endured imprisonment and martyrdom, in defence of their truth. No company of men in that church, ever went abroad, claiming such powers and openly exerting them in presence of foes as well as friends. No man ever gave up his previous belief on account of them; and besides all this, their absolute falsehood has been ex-

posed, over and over again. Let the unbeliever try to draw a parallel between the false miracles which grew out of knavish dishonesty, practising its arts upon blind superstition, and the true miracles which were public, open, acknowledged by bitter enemies, appealed to as the very ground of conviction, and believed in, notwithstanding the terrors of persecution, and the tortures of the most cruel death,—and he will confess, if candid, that no comparison can exist between them. The one class of actions displayed the power of God,—the other the juggling of man; the one was the triumphant appeal of truth,—the other was the dishonest cloak of falsehood. The one built the Church of Christ in the face of bitter opposition,—the other broke its unity to pieces, and brought in a flood of confusion and impiety, upon the fold of the Redeemer. Here truly there is contrast enough, but no comparison.

We conclude, then, by a recurrence to our first position. The Apostles and Evangelists who wrote the books of the New Testament, represent themselves, in the language of the text, as eyewitnesses of the life, miracles, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ; as well as of the subsequent events recorded in the book of the Acts and the epistles. They could not have been deceived as to what they saw,—such deception was utterly impossible. Neither were they deceivers,—as totally impracticable was this imposture as the other. The result is as sure as any inference can be,—the facts recorded in these sacred books must be true, absolutely and infallibly true. And the conviction founded upon these writings, is in no respect less, but in some respects more satisfactory than would be derived from the evidence of our

senses. This position—strange as it may seem,—together with a view of the reasonableness of the mode in which it has pleased God to display his revelation to us, will form the subject of our next discourse. Meanwhile, my beloved brethren, we may not trespass longer on your attention, than to remind you, that all the wonders of the life of Christ, and all the love and mercy of his sufferings and death, and all the labors, miracles, self denial, and martyrdom of his Apostles, will avail nothing but to deepen our condemnation, unless our faith be genuine, heartfelt, and sincere. What profits it that we should confess the Redeemer with our lips, if, in our conduct, we deny him? What argument can be expected to prevail with the unbeliever, who is soured and disgusted with the living examples of Christianity? May the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit enable us all to furnish that practical comment upon the Word of God, which may best promote the extension of pure and undefiled religion. May we be defenders of the truth, not only in speculation, but in performance, that so, walking in the steps of the primitive disciples, and manifesting to all around us, the proper energy of a saving faith, we may be accepted, justified and sanctified, through the atonement and merits of our only Lord and Saviour.

DISCOURSE IV.

2 Cor. V. 20.

Now then we are ambassadors for christ, as though god did beseech you by us.

We have endeavored, my brethren, in our two last discourses, to shew, in a simple and condensed form, the authenticity and historical certainty of the books of the New Testament. And we design to consider the proofs of the Christian Revelation, which rest on the prophecies and the establishment of the Church, together with the principal objections of infidelity, before we close our course. But we have promised that on the present occasion, we should examine a difficulty, which not only meets us in the works of our avowed adversaries, but also in the language of every heart at times,—namely, the question, why the Almighty should choose to commit his truth to books, and make men his messengers to men, instead of revealing himself plainly and directly to every individual.

The eloquent infidel, Rousseau, has put this difficulty into a striking form, which we shall present to you, on the fairest principle of argument, in his own words. 'If God has spoken,' says this subtle sophist, 'why have I heard nothing of it? I would rather have heard

God himself speaking, than listen to men speaking in his name. It would cost him no more, and I should be secure from error. The wonders by which his messengers were accredited are only in books. These books were made by men; I have nothing better for the whole than human testimony. Men report to me what other men have reported. How many men between God and me! But nevertheless, you ask me to examine—to compare—to verify. O! if God had deigned to dispense with all this labor, should I have served him with less sincerity of heart?"*

Now this is a kind of sophistry, which has its sole origin in pride and presumption. An humble, docile spirit was never yet affected by it. Still, the adversary of our souls makes such extensive use of it, and it carries on its face so much plausibility to the careless mind, that we wish to demonstrate its utter futility, before we proceed to the ultimate topics of our undertaking.

And here let me be distinctly understood as appealing to reason, and to reason alone. On the principles of reason we assert the objection to be absurd and unphilosophical. The Christian, indeed, has a shorter and a better argument. He has a spiritual witness within him—the consciousness of a living faith—that the Scriptures are the wisdom of God. But this is an argument only to the Christian. To the skeptical, the unconvinced—the doubting mind, human reason is the only tribunal, because he acknowledges no other. Let this reason then,—the blessed gift of God, be honestly exercised, and not until it has done its office will we ask such minds to appeal to faith.

Emile. 4. B. p. 213.

But in order to put the question in its true light, let us enquire, what is the Christian system? It is the offer of pardon from God, the eternal Sovereign, to a guilty world. To make this offer, the Son of God descends on earth, assumes our nature, declares the conditions of redemption, renders a full atonement to the offended justice of heaven, rises from the tomb, appoints his Ambassadors, promises them the seal of their commission in the power of working miracles, and ascends to heaven. Through their instrumentality, he establishes his Church among all nations: and when the whole is settled into a regular and abiding form, the offered pardon is proclaimed by the appointed ministers of reconciliation, and the recorded history of the facts, by the eyewitnesses themselves, is appealed to, as to the truth of God. Now the unbeliever asks, Why, if the Lord has once appeared on earth, he does not appear always? If miracles were at one period performed to attest the truth, why are they not performed still? If God has once spoken directly to any of his creatures, why does he not still speak directly to every one? And if the King of heaven has a message of mercy to deliver, why does he send human messengers with that message, instead of carrying it himself? Alas! who that felt as he ought, the condemnation due to his transgressions, would think of such questions as these? What criminal under sentence of death, ever refused to accept the record of his pardon, because the Governor did not condescend to deliver it with his own hand?

But let us examine the reasonableness of the alleged difficulty. And first, I presume it will be granted, that all men stand in need of two things,—a

knowledge of the will of God, and forgiveness when they have transgressed it. To suppose that the Creator made us what we are—endowed us with such sublime and comprehensive faculties—gave us passions which require so much regulation and restraint—and placed us in a circle of such varied social duties—and yet that he cares nothing about the course of conduct which we pursue, and has no will whether we be virtuous and happy, or vicious and miserable,—this notion is so utterly irrational, that the very idiot might be ashamed of it. Infinitely more probable is it, that the Creator does care for his own work, and does will the virtue and happiness of his creatures. Now then, as it is reasonable that our Maker has such a will concerning us, and as it is incontrovertible that he must know, far better than we can, what will render us happy, it is plain that he would be likely to inform us—to give us rules, to establish laws for our guidance, and thus, in his infinite benevolence, to make the same provision for our moral and spiritual, that we see he has made for our bodily welfare.

But again; we are all conscious of sin. We all know that we have violated, times without number, even our own rules of morality. We all feel that a pure and holy Being, such as the Deist acknowledges God to be, cannot look on our lives without condemning a vast deal that he beholds there. Consequently we are obliged to confess that we have offended him on occasions innumerable, for who can reckon his open transgressions, much less his secret faults? Here then, arises our need of forgiveness; and, of course, whether God will forgive, and on what conditions, are questions demanding a revelation again. On these two points

therefore, first, the will of our Creator concerning our moral and spiritual conduct, which is the law of God,—and secondly, his will that we may be pardoned, and the mode how, when we have violated his commands, which is the Gospel—we stand in absolute need of express information. Our reason cannot guide us in such enquiries as these without a positive declaration of the Divine will. We may imagine, as we please, what course of conduct will commend us to the favor of the Eternal; but is it reasonable to think that the Almighty would leave us to wander, amidst doubts and difficulties, the sport of our passions and desires, when, by a revelation of his will, he could furnish us with a plain and unerring guide? We may imagine, as we please, that the Deity will pardon our transgressions; but is it reasonable to think that he would leave us to the alternate dangers of presumption and despair, distracted between hope and fear, ignorant and bewildered with regard to what most concerned us, when, by a revelation of his purpose, he could give us a sure directory, and set our hearts at rest? Manifestly then, we stand in need of a revelation, and it is reasonable to believe,—yea it seems absurd not to believe—that a benevolent God would grant it to us.

The next question is, how such a revelation should be made, according to the views of enlightened reason. And this we may venture to answer by asking how it could be made? God is the pure and holy Creator,—man is the sinful creature; God is a Spirit,—man is flesh; God is without passions, without weakness, without infirmity,—man is the slave of his appetites, driven to and fro by every impulse of his nature. How could the communication be opened between

them? Is it not perfectly plain that God must descend to us—accommodate himself to our condition—speak to us in the words of earth—explain himself as man to man—for otherwise, how could we understand him at all? What do we know of the language of heaven, or of the modes and usuages of the spiritual world? How simple then, is it to conceive, that there never could have been any revelation from the Deity, unless God had graciously condescended to come to our level, and address us in our own way? And is not this precisely what he has done in the numerous personal appearances related in the Old Testament, especially in the manifestation of his mercy in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, as recorded in the New, and in the various ambassadors, the Prophets and Apostles, commissioned to be his agents to mankind?

We see then, thus far, that the very necessity of the case seems to demand the first principle of revelation, viz. that God should speak to us as man; and the second is equally plain. For how should mankind know, that the Being, who thus held intercourse with them, was indeed Divine, or divinely commissioned? How should they know that the voice which spoke to them in the language of earth, was indeed the voice of a Superior Intelligence—the voice of God, or of an ambassador from him? Why manifestly, in one way only, namely, by the connecting with the revelation, some exhibition of superhuman power; in other words, by miracles. These are the seals of Omnipotence to the senses of men. These are the proofs which distinguished the words of Deity from the words of all mortal communication. And by something of this nature alone, could it have been demonstrated to our world, that God had indeed spoken.

We may readily see by this reflection, that the question of miracles is like the other, a question of necessity, not choice. All the works of God are wonderful; but they are all arranged according to a vast and harmonious system, which operates so smoothly and so constantly, with such beautiful regularity and order, that men forget the power which framed and supports the whole. But a miracle is an interruption of the general laws of the Almighty,—it is a violent exception to the general rule,—it is a temporary invasion of the general repose of nature. And nothing can be more absurd, in the eyes of reason, than to expect that the Almighty would be more profuse of such acts than the necessity of the case required. Some proofs of this description were indispensable to the confirmation of the fact, that God had spoken; and, like every thing else in his glorious and majestic system, even these proofs were lavished, at the proper periods, with a liberal and munificent hand. But there was a limit beyond which mankind could not reasonably ask them; and when that limit was attained, the very preservation of our peace, and the cultivation of piety itself, required that they should cease.

Now this brings us to the point of difficulty proposed by the unbeliever. Why does not God make a distinct revelation to every individual man? Why does he not humor the petulance and presumption of every arrogant caviller, by private communications and private miracles, merely to suit his particular case? Why,—to use the words of the infidel Rousseau, which I have already quoted,—why does not the Majesty of heaven save each single objector the trouble of examination and reflection, by the exhibition of some overwhelming

wonder, which should at once convince and convert him? And in order to understand what signs he would require, let us quote from the same author, another passage; where he presumes to find fault with the want of dignity, as he calls it, in the miracles performed by the Saviour.

'Let a man appear' says this infidel philosopher, 'and hold this language to us. Mortals! I announce to you the will of the Supreme Being; acknowledge, in my voice, the Sovereign who sends me. I order the sun to change his course, the stars to form a different arrangement, the mountains to sink down into a plain, the waves to rise up, and the whole earth to take another aspect. At these wonders, who,' continues he, 'would not recognize, at the instant, the master of nature? But who shall dare to tell me how many eyewitnesses it requires to render a miracle worthy of faith? If your miracles, done for the purpose of proving your doctrine, stand in need themselves of being proved, of what use are they? as well might they never have been performed at all.'*

Such is the argument of Rousseau, and this is the plan which he would recommend for the evidence of a divine revelation. Now then, let us bring the demands of this reasoner to the test of reason. To convince him that the Deity is actually addressing mankind in human form, or that he has authorised his special messengers to declare his will, it is not enough that the benevolent wonders of Christ and his Apostles should be wrought before the very eyes of this philosopher. Nay, it is not enough that the more

*Emile. 4 B. p. 216.

striking miracles of the first revelation be executed, but all the universe must be thrown into confusion. The sun must change his course; the stars must desert their orbits; mountains must disappear; the sea must rise up; and the whole earth take a different aspect. Then this sagacious dictator would condescend to believe. But it would not be sufficient to do this once, for the gratification of human incredulity. It would be necessary for the supposed Ambassador of God to make the same proclamation in every corner of the globe, and perform the same wonders at every repetition, because Rousseau tells us that human testimony is nothing, and therefore the allegation of one company who heard the prophet announce these miracles, and saw them done at his word, would have no influence on the next company who did not hear and see him. Of course, by this profound device, the Ambassador of God must go round the world, delivering the same message and exhibiting the same wonders to every new crowd, since none must venture to believe their neighbor, and every ear must hear, and every eye must see for itself. And so the sun and the stars must be continually changing, and the mountains and seas rising and falling, and the whole earth taking a new aspect without intermission. And if so, WHO COULD LIVE? Where were the business, and the feelings, and the system of human existence? Nay, where would be the whole universe, when suns and planets themselves, must be whirled in disorder, to please the wanton fancy of incredulous men!

But it would not even suffice, to have this tremendous display exhibited to one generation; because Rousseau, and along with him, David Hume, and all

the rest of our deistical philosophers, deny that any human testimony can prove a miracle. Therefore, even if one generation of men could live through the elemental war which he thinks reasonable in order to prove a revelation from God to man, their children would grow up at perfect liberty to deny the whole. They must not believe on the evidence of their fathers' senses,—no ! they must see and hear for themselves. And therefore, very philosophically setting down their parents for knaves or fools, they demand a new Ambassador, who shall again proclaim his high commission, and again order the sun, and stars, and seas, and mountains, and the general aspect of the earth, to abandon their settled course, and destroy, for their whim, the whole system of nature! Now here, in sober detail, is the plan of the infidel's devising, which he offers as an improvement upon the evidence of Christian truth. And if ever the brain of man conceived a wilder and more absurd idea, I acknowledge myself ignorant of the first principles of common sense.

Granting however, that all men would not go to the same extent, yet who would, or who could live in a world, which was, in any degree, subject to be disturbed by the folly of incredulity, asking for signs ? Hence we find the wisdom of Christ steadily refusing to gratify the infidels of Jerusalem. 'An evil and adulterous generation' saith he, 'seeketh after a sign.' And although he did signs and wonders to testify the truth of his revelation, yet he did them, not to please the caprice of his enemies, but according to his own divine discretion, and at the supplication of his friends. Therefore no man was injured by the miracles of

the Gospel. No interruption was given to the regular system of things. Nor was the universe thrown into confusion to suit the arrogant dictation of philosophers, who wanted to be convinced against their will, and to be saved the trouble, forsooth, of an impartial examination.

This may suffice to shew the utter absurdity of the idea, that human sagacity could point out a better plan for the evidence of a divine revelation than that which it has pleased God to execute. But when this revelation was made, why should it not be recorded by those who were ear-witnesses of the doctrine, and eye-witnesses of the facts? And why should not the books thus written, be a sufficient testimony to other generations? For it is evident, that this revelation must either be constantly renewed to each successive race of men, or else be committed to the treacherous keeping of human memory, or else be, as it has been, recorded in a tangible form for the study and benefit of all. We ask reason to say which is the more reasonable mode of preserving and transmitting the intelligence, especially when this is connected with an order of men, devoted to the propagation of its truths. All facts are treasured up in writing,—why should not these? All laws of earthly governments are written,—why should not the law of heaven? All proclamations and declarations of pardon are written,—why should not the Gospel of divine forgiveness? All truth, all science, all wisdom amongst men, is sought in books,—and why should not the truth, the science, and the wisdom, of the Lord's own bestowing, be laid up in this—the best human depository,—the safest and the surest form of earthly preservation? We have already shewn

the necessity by which the revelation of God to man was given through human language, because we could understand no other; and as plain does it seem to my mind, that the recording of this revelation in a book, was equally necessary, since we could not study it so beneficially in any other mode. Doctrines addressed to the ear alone, are transient and liable to be misunderstood. They may impress deeply for the moment, but are apt soon to fly away. Put in writing, however, we can learn them thoroughly, meditate upon, and commit them to our memories and our hearts, so as to imbue our whole minds and spirits with them, and incorporate them into the very substance of our thoughts and feelings. When we remember therefore, the proper design of a revelation, viz. to teach us the law of God, and the conditions of forgiveness, so as to make them the leading motives of our lives, how strange that infidelity should object to the very form, which is manifestly the best, if not the only one, adapted to the condition of human nature!

But it may be asked, whether it would not be better that God should still, in all ages of the Church, continue the standing evidence of miracles, to help the doubting and the wavering to acknowledge his Scriptures of truth? To this, we answer in the negative. We have already said, that the preservation of our peace, and the cultivation of our piety, require that miracles should cease, when they have done their office of proving, in the first instance, a revelation of God to man. The history of the Church shews, that divine truth, once established and recorded, no longer needs them; and, if not needed, they would seem to be injurious, since it is plain that an age of miracles must be a period of

anxiety and perturbation. We are so constituted, that every deviation from the common course of things agitates and confounds us. The faculties are disturbed—business is suspended—duties overlooked—labors forgotten. Only let us imagine what an effect would be produced in our day, by the exhibition of any of those wonders recorded in the acts of the Apostles. What crowds would throng together to behold them—what inevitable mischief and confusion must ensue, through the neglect of the quiet, steady operations of social life—what contempt of the ordinary means of health and comfort, through an idle reliance on the ministers of God—and how a vain and wandering curiosity would usurp the place of diligence and virtue. Such a state of things, in the view of enlightened reason, ought to be temporary, in compassion to the very weakness of man. And therefore, it would seem to us a most just inference from the wisdom and benevolence of God, that when they had fully performed their office of establishing the revealed will of heaven, miracles must cease.

If, however, notwithstanding this reflection, the thought of the infidel should at any time glance across the mind of the believer, 'Why have I not seen some of these wondrous things,—Why has not God spoken to me also?' let reason reprove the folly of such a desire, by calling to remembrance the effect of those awful revelations upon the best and holiest men that ever lived. The Prophet Daniel and the Apostle John both record their feelings, when addressed in this supernatural manner. They fainted—they fell down as dead, and could not listen till they were strengthened by superior power. In the book of Job, we have

one of the lighter impressions made by these communications. 'In thoughts from the visions of the night,' saith Eliphaz, 'when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face, the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof; an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God; shall a man be more pure than his Maker?" Such was the inevitable terror accompanying these superhuman communications, that all the Prophets seem to have dreaded their office, instead of desiring it. True, the particulars of their feelings are not always given in Scriptures, but when they are given, we find them of the very kind which reason itself dictates. For let us remember, how the least suspicion of any thing supernatural, excites and depresses us all. How few men can bear to be long alone, even with a dead body. How few men could endure to hold conversation with an invisible spirit. Do we not all know that many have gone mad with fear from only imagining that they had seen a spectre? And let the firmest hearts that ever beat in mortal bosom, live in daily and hourly expectation that a voice from heaven might strike upon their ear,—let them be subject to have their sleep broken by unearthly sounds and apparitions declaring the revelation of the Most High,—let them be set forth to mankind as the Prophets and Apostles,—the appointed recipients of the Divine will,—in the midst of trembling and fainting, and burning excitement, and unnatural impulses, which strained every nerve and faculty to their highest tension,—let the boldest and

bravest I say, once endure these inevitable results of the Divine communications, and they would be glad to escape from so terrible a distinction. Such is the effect of human depravity—such the awful consequences of sin—such our inherent weakness,—that we cannot bear a direct sensible manifestation of the presence of the Deity. And these, let it be marked, were the effects with the best of men,—with the faithful, the holy, the humble worshippers of the living and true God,—with those to whom the Almighty might be supposed to manifest his sensible presence in the gentlest possible way. But what if the arrogant spirit of the infidel should have its desire? What if the proud and stubborn temper of objection and defiance, which dictates to the Eternal and Omnipotent Creator, how and to whom his revelations should be made, were gratified? What might such expect,—if indeed the voice of God should strike upon their ear,—but instant destruction. O! fools and mad,—to talk so lightly and so boldly of what they will not understand. Even reason might tell them, that it must be a fearful thing to listen, with mortal ear, to the voice of the Almighty. Even reason, which has often fled in terror from her throne, when only the voice of a disembodied spirit has been thought to have addressed it, would shrink and recoil from parleying with the Father of spirits, in utter dismay.

No! blessed be the mercy and compassion of the Lord, which, in pity to our weakness, spares us such a shock, as an immediate revelation to our senses must inevitably be to all, so long as we are in the flesh, occupying this fallen world, surrounded by infirmity. Blessed be his wisdom and goodness, which has in

general confined those manifestations to the Prophets and Apostles, men raised up and strengthened supernaturally, for their sublime but awful work; while the rest of mankind have been invited to contemplate his truth and love, in quietness and peace, without distraction or terror. Thrice only, has the Almighty departed from the general rule, as if to shew us, the more clearly, the necessity of its adoption. Once, when he spake amidst the thunders of Sinai, and the Israelites, though standing in crowds, and previously sanctified, yet trembled and quaked, and begged Moses to ask that 'the Lord might speak no more unto them, or they would die.' The second, when the manifestation attested the dignity of Christ on the banks of Jordan; and the third, when in answer to the Saviour's prayer, that the Father would glorify his name, it was proclaimed from heaven, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.' The assembled crowd that listened to these few words, were struck with awe, for 'some said it thundered, and others that an angel had spoken unto him.' Manifestly therefore, the effect of such things is too terrific, for the proper purposes of a general revelation. And hence, in nothing have we more reason to bless the goodness of God, than in this very peculiarity, that while, at the declaration of his will from time to time, as the world required and could bear it,—wonders and miracles accompanied it, more than enough to convince the most incredulous, if their hearts had not been opposed to the truth,—yet for the general use, a record was made,—proved,—guarded,—witnessed by a flood of testimony, but asking nothing at our hands, beyond a teachable and docile mind; surrounded by no terrors,—attended by no

supernatural dread,—but commending itself to every candid searcher, by its purity, its sublime simplicity, its benevolence, its love, its surpassing tenderness to the best interests of sinful men, in time and in eternity.

But the unbeliever wants a revelation that shall save him the trouble of examining. And wherefore should the Lord gratify the criminal carelessness of such a desire? Do we not know that every pursuit in life requires trouble? Do we not know that it is even necessary, for our own good, that we should make our acquisitions of every kind, with effort and with toil? Who values that for which he has not labored? Who economises the wealth which he has not earned? Who cares for the knowledge which has cost him nothing? And how dare any mortal man shew his willingness to apply his powers to every branch of human learning, and yet impiously ask that the God of heaven shall save him the trouble of examining where the truth of his revelation is concerned, and so construct it as to relieve him from the pains of searching and reflecting for himself in that pursuit, which is better worth the toil than all other science put together? Alas! how the pride of philosophy must have intoxicated his brain, when a man like Rousseau, could publish so absurd an objection! And how fully is the saying of the Scripture justified when it declares, that 'the Lord taketh the wise in their own craftiness, that he knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.'

Thanks then, my brethren, be to the Eternal and Supreme, the Only Wise God, for the modes of evidence which demonstrate the sanctity of the Scriptures.

Thanks be to him, that while the proofs of their divine origin are so abundant, that no humble searcher after truth can doubt, they are not calculated to force or terrify,—to overwhelm, or to constrain. Thanks be to him, that while, on the first promulgation of his will from heaven, wonders accompanied it as the seal of its authority, yet that as soon as their proper office was accomplished, miracles appaered no more. Still, however, there is a kind of revelation, which the Spirit of God, through Christ Jesus, makes to every faithful seeker. Not an outward revelation to the senses, but an inward revelation to the heart. Not in distinct words or voices, but in the gentle, and insensible, though precious influences, which purify and enlighten, and console. 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,' by that species of continued miracle, which after all, is the most persuasive evidence of the Gospel—the conversion and sanctification of the sinner. In that mighty change, every Christian becomes a direct and living witness of the truth of God, and an instrument to win others, in turn, that they, too, may seek the blessings of salvation.

May the Lord grant us all, grace to perceive the perfect wisdom displayed in every part of the system of Redemption. May we look down with pity on the futile objections of the unbeliever, who blindly censures what is best entitled to his praise. And while we take the sacred record of divine truth, as a light to our feet and a lamp to our paths, may we all be enabled to follow our Leader and our Guide to that world, where we shall 'see face to face, and know even as we are known,'—where sin and infirmity will

no longer be barriers to the full communion with God; —where we shall hear him without apprehension— behold him without fear—and rejoice in the unclouded manifestation of his glory, for evermore!

DISCOURSE V.

Isaiah, XLI. 23.

Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.

All men will agree, my brethren, that one of the peculiar attributes of Deity, is foreknowledge; that is, the full power of surveying all things before they come to pass, and before there are any circumstances existing which can necessarily give rise to them. No knowledge of this description is within the compass of our intellect. We can indeed conjecture what may happen; and in many instances, experienced men, reflecting on what has been, and reasoning on the present condition of things, may imagine, very nearly, what is likely to happen again. But nothing of this kind can be called foreknowledge, because it is utterly uncertain. The power to declare positively what a single day shall bring forth, belongs not to man; since even the wisest and most profound thinkers are continually surprised by the unexpected turns of human affairs, and that too, in the familiar and everyday concerns of mortality. Manifestly then, the ability to deliver predictions, or to foretell accurately what is to come to pass, can only be possessed and communicated by the Eternal and Supreme Being, whose knowledge is as boundless as his power.

We may therefore, lay it down, as an incontrovertible principle, that predictions of future events, which are commonly called prophecies, do clearly establish the fact of a divine revelation; and hence we arrive at the second great proof of the Christian system. Of the first, viz. miracles, we have already treated; and prophecy is not one jot inferior to miracles, but rather superior; since, when rightly considered, it stands in place of a continued miracle, and increases in the strength of its testimony with the lapse of time.

In order to consider how this branch of evidence bears upon the Christian system, it will be necessary to remember that the Jewish and the Christian religions are in substance one. The design of God from the period of the fall, was the same, viz. the salvation of mankind through the appointed Redeemer. The first prophecy on record foretold that 'the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head,' and the various dispensations, predictions, and ordinances of the Old Testament, all pointed to the consummation which Christ should in due time effect, with more or less clearness. Therefore Christianity is to be regarded, not as a distinct plan, but as the completing and perfecting the Jewish system. And the prophecies are more especially to be viewed in this light, because it was the constant object of our great Redeemer to shew that not one tittle of the Old Testament Scriptures could pass away, until all were fulfilled.

On these two pillars of superhuman testimony,—miracles and prophecy,—the truth of God stands firm. We have shewn, in our last discourse, how necessary it was, on account of the very infirmity of our nature, that the Almighty should descend to our level in making his

revelation to us ; and that no man could bear a direct communication with the great Creator, unless he were strengthened by superior power. We have shewn that reason itself could devise no other mode of making this revelation, so beneficent and kind, and withal so effectual, as the employment of special instruments from our own race, who should act as the ambassadors of heaven, and who, at the same time, should prove their divine commission, not only by the general holiness and purity of their lives, and by their martyrdom in support of their doctrine, but also by the performance of such wonders as nothing but Almighty power could display. We shewed also, as we trust, the utter absurdity of the scheme proposed by our most celebrated infidels, as an improvement on the mode in which a divine revelation should be made to man : and even in this stage of the evidence, we might have challenged human ingenuity fairly to evade the conclusion, that Christianity must be the truth of God.

But the indulgence of heaven does not stop at this point of demonstration. By miracles the Lord gave testimony to his word, at the very periods in which his several revelations were first promulgated. And he condescended to give the evidence of prophecy to all future generations, as a further confirmation of his truth. In general, the same individuals who performed the miracles, pronounced the prophecies ; and the same Scriptures which record the wondrous acts, likewise record the equally wondrous predictions. What could the imagination of a reasonable man ask more, in order to authenticate the communications of the Most High, than a concurrence of things like these ? Nay, what more could the most audacious incredulity

say to the messengers of heaven than this,—Shew us miracles, and tell us what shall come to pass hereafter? Both these demands are anticipated by the goodness of God. On both, the external proofs of his truths are mainly founded. And there is no other system of religion but that of the Bible, which lays claim to both in its very establishment, and which even defies the priests of idolatry,—as in the text,—to the trial of competition.

The limits we have proposed to the present discourse, will not allow of an extensive notice of the prophecies; for this would require a volume. But we design to point out, first, their general plan; secondly, their variety; thirdly, the reasons why, in general, the prophecies seem obscure; fourthly, we shall shew a few instances of Scriptural predictions, together with their fulfilment; and fifthly, we shall consider the doctrine of the sophistical advocates of infidelity, in reference to this branch of the evidences of the Christian system: and we pray you, my brethren, to grant us your best attention; since no subject so fully deserves it, and none can so well repay you, as the earnest and candid examination of the wisdom and the truth of God.

1. The general plan of prophecy is,—like its blessed Author,—stupendous and magnificent in its whole range, commencing with the fall of our first parents,—tracing out, with marvellous precision, the means provided for the restoration of our race,—shewing the destiny of all the principal nations of the earth, especially of the chosen people—clearly predicting the progress of the Church, its corruptions, its calamities, and its final prosperity,—and carrying forward its sublime predictions even to the end of the world, the judgment, the doom of everlasting woe, and the inheritance

of eternal glory. What human mind could dare to conceive so vast a compass? And how plainly the very immensity of such a plan, bears the impress of the Deity!

2. But secondly, the variety of the prophecies is as astonishing to the reflecting mind, as their extent. It is not a few isolated predictions, dispersed here and there amongst the fragments of antiquity, growing up into no system, and pointing to no important end: but it is a vast number of predictions, some of them relating to individuals; some to nations, some to particular results of particular courses of conduct, some obscure, and others plain; but all connected with the great purpose of establishing the truth of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the regeneration of mankind, through the influence of pure religion. In this connexion the prophecies must always be viewed, if we would properly appreciate their value. Each single prediction, may seem comparatively unimportant by itself, like the links of a chain when severed from each other. But viewed in their connexion, they are seen to form one whole, worthy of the blessed object of their communications,—the reviving the hopes and confirming the faith of a ruined world.

3. This brings us, however, in the third place, to consider the objection made to the prophecies,—that they are generally so obscure as to render it difficult, if not impossible, to be confident of their true interpretation. And in order that we may understand the force of this common allegation, we shall enquire what sort of clearness it would be reasonable to demand in such a subject. It is perfectly familiar to us all, that there is nothing to which we are more inclined than a

curious searching into futurity. The history of human superstition, in seeking for prophecies from divination, magic, astrology, fortune telling, and dreams,—even down to the present day,—shews most clearly the danger to our own welfare of attempting to interfere with the sober regularity of life, beyond what is strictly necessary for great and important ends. Perhaps, however, the simplest mode of proving this assertion is to consider it, in the first place, as applied to a private personal prediction. Suppose then, for instance, that I were certainly informed beforehand of my future destiny,—that my plans in life would fail,—that I should commit some terrible outrage against the order of society,—and that my end would be disastrous and horrible. Here indeed would be a prophecy, exact enough in its terms; but what would be its effect on me? Would it not either rouse me to a struggle against Omnipotence, in a fierce temper of stubborn opposition to the will of heaven,—or else fill me with dejection and despondency? And if the latter, as is most likely, were the operation of such a prophecy, would it not paralyze every effort, and sink me into despair? Would it not weigh down my spirits and break my heart, and become itself the very instrument to hurry me into the gulf of ruin? And would such a communication at all consist with the wisdom and goodness of the Deity? On the contrary, let me be assured beforehand that my plans will certainly succeed,—that my career will be infallibly prosperous,—and that I shall leave the world distinguished by wealth, and honor, and renown. Here again, would be an exact prophecy; but what would be its effect? Should I not be rendered proud and indolent, and presumptuous? Relying on my high

destiny, would not all humble diligence and industry be put to flight; and would not the very clearness of the prediction in this case, tend to prevent the possibility of its fulfilment, by alluring me to neglect the necessary means? And would it be wise or benevolent in the Deity, to lay such a temptation in the path of creatures so infirm as we are?

But now, let me be told the same thing substantially, in another way. Let it be said conditionally, that if I desert my God, and follow the evil guidance of my passions, my course through life will be disastrous, and my last end terrible and wretched;—whereas if I serve my Redeemer with faithful constancy, and bring all my designs and desires into conformity to his will, I shall be prosperous and happy, and honored and esteemed. The prophecy, in this mode of stating it, is as much above human capacity as in the other, and as truly marks the divine mind, because nothing but the foreknowledge of God can certainly connect a particular consequence with a particular course of conduct. But the effect of its language on my life, is of a totally different character. It no longer interferes with my freedom of action. The fear which it inspires, is salutary and corrective. The hope which it administers is cheering and delightful. And at the close of my career,—looking back upon the chequered path of my mortal existence, and marking how accurately each branch of the alternative was fulfilled, in exact proportion to the extent of the declared conditions,—should I not acknowledge, with far deeper reverence, the prescience of God exhibited in such a prediction, when I should have experienced the blessed truth, that the mode in which it was manifested to me

had made me a happier and a better man, and had thus displayed, not only the foreknowledge of the Deity, but also his wisdom and his love ?

We see then, here, a principle which will serve to guide us to a proper understanding of the proposed objection; namely, that it is necessary for our good, that prophecy should never be so clear as to interfere with the freedom of human agency, or with the true motives of moral action. For the very same enquiry which we have just concluded into the effect of too distinct a prediction upon an individual, will apply, with still greater force, to communities and nations; because the popular feeling is easily excited to any thing mischievous or extreme, and no people could safely be trusted with a clear and open prophecy in any other shape, than as it was made conditional on their obedience or disobedience to the laws of God.

This shews us, in the first place, why the remarkable predictions of the Scripture, concerning the future state of Israel, are usually expressed in alternative or conditional terms. And it opens the way to the reason why the other prophecies,—particularly those relative to Christ,—though not conditional, are yet, to a certain degree, obscure. For if they had been so plain that the Jews could not have misunderstood them, is it not manifest that they would either not have fulfilled them at all, or else they must have been compelled to fulfil them against their will, by the mere power of the Almighty; which would have been totally inconsistent with his justice and his goodness, as the moral Governor of the world.

To understand this aright, however, let us remember that prophecy is the declaration beforehand of what

men will choose to do, when left to their own free will, under the full exercise of their faculties, and especially without any influence on the part of the Deity, constraining or tempting them to go astray. Suppose then, that, at the coming of Christ, the types and prophecies had been so arranged and so connected, that no man could possibly misapply them. Suppose that all the Jews had been obliged to acknowledge that Christ was the Son of God, and to see that they were predicted to be his murderers, and that, in consequence of this, they would be delivered up to the Romans, and their city destroyed after the most frightful miseries had been inflicted on them, and they themselves had been, some slain, some enslaved, and the rest driven to be wanderers throughout the earth for centuries together.—Suppose, I say, that the prophecies which declare all this, had been so clear, that the Jews must inevitably, and as it were, in spite of themselves, have fully comprehended them, what must have been the result? Would they not have been excited to a stubborn spirit of contradiction, and have refused to fulfil them? Would they not have resisted the natural current of their own wickedness, merely through fear for their temporal safety? Would not the case have presented a plain struggle between God and man,—the Deity saying that they would do so, and they replying that they would not? And under such circumstances, is it not manifest, either that the power of God must have forced them to crucify the Redeemer against their will, or that the truth of his predictions must have been disgraced forever?

From the reasonable necessity of the case then, arises the great characteristic of positive prophecy,

that it must always be clear enough to determine its meaning, after the event has occurred, but never so clear beforehand as to interfere with the liberty of human action. The difficulty of thus constructing it is so great, that no human ingenuity could have devised the marvellous union of obscurity and plainness, of light and shade, of doubt and certainty, which characterizes this part of the inspired word. And therefore, while the unbelieving Jew,—in the hardness of his impenitent heart,—mistook the sense of prophecy, and while the modern infidel,—equally impenitent and more proud,—derides its obscurity, the humble worshipper has always been confirmed in his faith by that portion which is accomplished, and comforted by the promise of those events which are yet to come; and the reasonable and teachable mind has never failed to discover, in the vast and sublime comprehension of the plan of prophecy, and the surpassing contrivance of its details, a constant subject of devout admiration of the goodness and wisdom of the Almighty.

4. While our own reason however, may thus fully justify the very characteristic of obscurity, to which the unbeliever objects, it is easy to shew that sufficient clearness exists in the prophetic Scriptures, to prove the revelation to be divine. In support of this assertion, we will briefly present to you the chief predictions relating to Christ, to sundry kingdoms of the earth, and to the destruction of Jerusalem.

With regard to the Redeemer, whose coming, character, and kingdom, form the burden of the book of God, there is scarcely a circumstance of note which is not to be found in the Prophets.

As to his birth, Moses prophesied that 'the seed of

the woman should bruise the serpent's head'. Jeremiah recognizes the same miracle; and Isaiah more fully declares that 'a virgin should conceive and bear a son.' The time was fixed by Jacob to be when 'the sceptre was departing from Judah,' by Haggai, while the city of Jerusalem and the temple were still standing, and by Daniel, when seven prophetic weeks,—that is, counting a day for a year, according to prophetic rule, four hundred and ninety years from the edict to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonish captivity,—should be fulfilled.

The place of his birth was predicted to be Bethlehem Ephrata; and the family from which he was to spring was to be that of Abraham, through Judah and David.

The star which should mark his nativity, was mentioned by the Prophet Balaam, fifteen hundred years before it guided the wise men of the East to the humble dwelling of his mother. And his forerunner, John the Baptist, was expressly mentioned by Isaiah and Malachi, the first, eight hundred, the second, four hundred and fifty years before the time.

Besides these predictions, his flight into Egypt,—his education at Nazareth,—his entry into Jerusalem,—his manner of teaching,—his zeal for the house of his Father,—the kind and quality of his miracles,—the price at which he was betrayed,—the use which was made of the money,—the treachery and misery of Judas,—the sufferings of our Lord,—his back given to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair,—his wounds, bruises and stripes,—the mode of his death,—the piercing of his hands and feet,—the spear that transfixed his side,—the mockery of the

multitude,—the parting of his garments,—the lots cast upon his vesture,—the dying cry on the cross,—his grave in the sepulchre of the rich man,—his body preserved from corruption,—his resurrection and ascension, and session at the right hand of God,—and the everlasting glory of his kingdom,—all these are the distinct subjects of prophecy. What more could the most incredulous desire?

But yet there is far more. The most peculiar and apparently irreconcileable characters are ascribed to him. He was predicted to be not only the Son of a woman, but the Son of God. Not only a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, but also the Redeemer,—the Lord of hosts,—God with us,—Wonderful,—the Mighty God,— the everlasting Father. On the one hand, he was to suffer the depths of mortal humiliation; on the other hand, he was to receive the highest possible exaltation. In no other instance could such extremes be found, such oppositions be united, as the Prophets predicted of the Messiah; and yet we know how accurately all was fulfilled.*

But we pass on to notice a few of the remarkable prophecies relating to the kingdoms of the earth. It was prophesied of Nineveh,—that exceeding great city of three days' journey,—that God should make an utter end of it; and where is it now? Its very situation is unknown. It was prophesied of Tyre, the ancient emporium of the world,—whose merchants were princes and her traffickers the honorable of the earth,—that God would lay her stones and her timber and her dust in the midst of the waters, that she

* Vide Wilson's ninth Lecture, for a very full detail.

should be made like the top of a rock, a place for spreading of nets in the midst of the sea. And how has it been accomplished? Volney relates that Tyre now consists only of fifty or sixty poor families, who live on the produce of their little ground and a trifling fishery. And Bruce states that it is now a rock whereon fishermen dry their nets; using almost the very language of the prophecy.

Again, it was prophesied of Babylon that it should be a perpetual desolation. Babylon, for ages after the pronouncing of the prediction, was the pride of the East, with its lofty walls on which many chariots could drive abreast, with its hanging gardens, once accounted one of the seven wonders of the world, with its unexampled magnificence and splendor. Yet its present state, as described by the latest travellers, corresponds most accurately to the language of the prophecy, delivered more than two thousand five hundred years before. It is literally a heap of ruins, and has been nothing better for fifteen centuries together.

Again, it was prophesied of Egypt, that it should be 'the basest of kingdoms, neither shall it exalt itself any more among the nations. There shall be no prince of the land of Egypt, the sceptre of Egypt shall pass away.' At the time when this prediction was uttered, Egypt was one of the mightiest kingdoms of the earth. It was the nursery of science and the arts, and even to this hour, no country presents such attractions to the antiquarian. But where is its greatness? For two thousand years it has been declining. Every attempt to elevate its character has proved abortive. Its literary eminence has fled,—its political

importance has vanished, and there is nothing to remind us of its former fame, except the records of history, and the colossal remains of that massy architecture which seems to mock the power of time.

We pass by many other examples of equal clearness, particularly the famous prophecy of Daniel, which sketches with such accuracy the progress of the four great kingdoms of the world, that many infidels have been driven boldly to deny its authenticity as their last resource. We shall only, in addition, remind you of the prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, as first given in the book of Deuteronomy, and afterwards, in greater detail, by our Lord himself. 'See ye not' saith the Saviour, 'these great buildings? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. These be the days of vengeance, that all things that are written may be fulfilled, for in those days shall be great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world unto this time, no, nor ever shall be, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled.'

We do not propose to dwell on the particular details of the fulfilment of this prophecy. Suffice it to say, that at the time it was delivered, nothing could be more unlikely. The Jews were at peace, protected by the power of the Roman sceptre. Yet according to the word of our Lord, before that generation passed away, viz., in less than forty years from their denial and rejection of Christ, all was accomplished. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was thrown down, and its very foundations razed to the ground. Upwards of a million perished miserably in the siege, almost

one hundred thousand were sold as slaves, and the rest were dispersed among all nations. As if in retribution for their crucifixion of the Redeemer, they themselves were crucified in such numbers by the Romans without the walls of Jerusalem, that in the language of the historian, 'room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses for the bodies.' And to this day the Jews continue dispersed, an outcast, oppressed, and unhappy people. Still, however, they remain distinct, a standing miracle amongst the nations of the world; for the prophecy again has promised that they shall not perish. 'When they be in the land of their enemies,' saith God, 'I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly. I will make a full end of the nations whither I have driven them, but I will not make a full end of thee.' And therefore they remain, preserving with the utmost care the very prophecies which condemn them, vainly looking for the Messiah whom they have rejected, and suffering uncounted miseries in the hope of being restored to their own land. In this, however, they will not be disappointed. For the same divine prophecies assure us that they shall yet acknowledge their Redeemer, and be gathered unto Jerusalem, and become the joy of the whole earth. And a long reign of piety and peace shall follow, and then shall be a short and final struggle of the powers of darkness, and at length the great consummation of all things shall arrive, when truth and holiness shall triumph, and sin and sorrow shall be known no more.

Now all the predictions to which we have briefly referred, my brethren, are distinct and plain in terms. Their obscurity is chiefly, if not altogether, to be at-

tributed to their being mentioned abruptly, and so mixed with other matters, as not to strike the attention of a careless reader. But diamonds are not the less diamonds, because they are found scattered in the earth, nor are prophecies less prophecies, because they are clothed in metaphor, or interspersed with narrative, or forms of devotion. In the world of nature, gold and jewels lie below the surface, and escape the thoughtless and indolent eye. Nay, even when found, they are not always recognized until some pains and labor have been bestowed to shew their real lustre. And is it reasonable that in the world of grace, the gold of divine truth, and the gems of celestial knowledge should not likewise need some search, some care, some honest reflection, before they can be fully exhibited, or thoroughly understood? Hence, although nothing can exceed the full glow of delighted conviction which is experienced by the humble and enquiring mind, in contemplating the munificent exuberance of evidence furnished by the prophetic portion of the book of God, yet it does not force conviction upon the unwilling. The strongest species of evidence could not do that. Even the miracles of Christ were attributed to Satan by those who were determined to credit any absurdity rather than the word of the Redeemer. But to the candid and the sincere searcher after truth, the prophecies furnish an inexhaustible mine of spiritual riches. The mercy, the justice, the wisdom, the knowledge of God, are exhibited by them in the most astonishing perfection; and the concentration and accumulated power of all their testimonies, excites the highest admiration in the intellect and the deepest reverence in the soul.

5. It remains that we notice, in the fifth and last place, the doctrine of our most noted infidels on this branch of the evidences of Christianity, which we shall perhaps do best by quoting to you the very words of Rousseau, the same eloquent Deist whose argument against miracles we considered in the last discourse. 'As to the prophecies' says this philosopher, 'no prophecy can have any authority with me, because in order to satisfy my mind, three things would be necessary, the concurrence of which is impossible. First, that I had been a witness of the prophecy, secondly, that I had been a witness of the fulfilment, and thirdly that it should be demonstrated, that this fulfilment could not have happened by chance. Because the clearness of a prediction made by guess, does not render the accomplishment of it impossible, and therefore even the apparent fulfilment of a prophecy, proves nothing.'*

This method of reasoning is truly a worthy companion for the plan of miracles which the same writer modestly proposes as an improvement on the Christian system. Nay, it is, if possible, more supremely absurd, since it would deprive the Deity of all power to manifest his foreknowledge to our world in any mode whatever. For first, this profound caviller tells us he must hear the original prediction, and then he must see the corresponding event, forgetting altogether, that the certainty of the prediction's having been actually delivered, is just as great when shewn in a book, as it could possibly be if he had heard the Pro-

*Emile. liv. 4. 224.

phet deliver it. But even this would not suffice him. For suppose the Almighty to have yielded to the perverseness of such folly, so as to have caused this man to have lived in the days of Moses and the Prophets, and to have continued his life for fifteen hundred years until he could have witnessed Jesus Christ fulfilling all the marvellous predictions concerning him, and supposing that from thence he had still been kept in being to the present day, in order to shew him the accurate accomplishment of other prophecies regarding the condition of the various ancient cities and countries, the establishment of the Church, and the dispersion of the Jews,—still after all this, he might turn round upon his third requisition, and ask to have it demonstrated, forsooth, that these events did not happen by chance, just as the atheist asks to have it demonstrated that the universe might not have existed by chance. Plainly then does Rousseau betray the hostile temper of his own mind, when he demands three conditions for his assent to prophecy, the concurrence of which he himself declares to be impossible. For this is precisely equivalent with saying, that it is impossible for the Omnipotent God to have arranged any convincing system of predictions whatever. And so we have this rational infidel denying the very power of the Almighty to manifest his foreknowlege by any method, to the satisfaction of his creatures. In vain we prove that the prophecies of the Old Testament have been for more than twenty-five hundred years in the sacred books of the Jews—although they have certainly no interest in defending the predictions relating to Christ, and to their own condemnation and degradation, and therefore their safe guardianship is above suspicion. In vain we

shew the complete correspondence of the events with the predictions, in the birth, life, sufferings, and death of Christ, the establishment of his kingdom, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews. The infidel replies, 'All this is nothing. The predictions might have been made by chance, and the events might have corresponded by chance.' What! all these events, so astonishing and so utterly unparalleled, predicted by so many different men, at such distant periods, and not one found to fail in a lapse of thirty-three hundred years? 'Yes,' replies our philosopher, 'even so. I will not believe these prophecies until you shall bring me three conditions, the concurrence of which I acknowledge to be totally impossible. Unless I had lived three thousand years ago, and heard all the predictions with my own ears, and beheld their fulfilment with my own eyes, I would not believe the Bible. Nay, even if I had heard and seen it all, still I would not believe; I would impute it all to chance, rather than submit to the Gospel of salvation.' Alas, if this be wisdom, what is folly? May the Almighty reduce my mind to the drivelling imbecility of idiocy, or the ravings of insanity itself, rather than suffer it to be perverted and poisoned by such philosophy as this!

But it is time, my beloved brethren, that we should close our imperfect examination of a subject, which has filled volumes, and which never can be exhausted by the industry or eloquence of man. We fear that we have already trespassed on your attention, and therefore we leave this branch of the Christian evidences, fully sensible that we have left unsaid much that belongs to it, and that what we have submitted to you might have been far more happily illustrated and

explained. The truth however is, that not only is the immensity of the subject too vast for the limits of a sermon, but it is too oppressive for the powers of an ordinary mind. For the purpose of this discourse, I have meditated on the beginning of prophecies, when the Deity consoled our exiled first parents, by the promise of the victorious seed of woman. I have marked its course in giving warning of the deluge, and in the assurance of returning fruitfulness and peace; the prediction of Noah, the covenant with Abraham, the blessings pronounced by Jacob, the prophecy of Balaam, the enlarged manifestation of the divine foreknowledge by Moses, then Samuel, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, and his twelve successors, until Malachi closes the prophetic canon previous to the coming of Christ, and the great object of the preparatory system is fulfilled. I have marked how the Saviour minutely collected together every dispersed ray of prophetic light, until they all met in him as in one centre of glory. I have thought on his own blessed predictions—his enemies overthrown, their habitation desolate, their nation scattered to the four winds, and yet marvellously preserved to the latter day for the ingathering of Israel. I have followed the progress of his Church from its small beginning in the hands of a few fishermen of Galilee, until it has spread through all the earth, established itself without a rival in the fairest and best half of the globe, and is ready to extend his name to every quarter. I have thought how surely his prophecy was accomplished, that the gates of hell should not prevail against it; I have traced even its very divisions and corruptions in the epistles and the revelation of St. John: and with all

this already fulfilled,—standing not far from the verge of time,—I have gazed along the luminous track which the same prophecy describes—the future exaltation of the Saints in the eternal world;—and I have felt the heart kindle, and the intellect fall prostrate in the mighty contemplation of the majesty, the splendor, the wisdom, the knowledge, the wonderful condescension and love displayed in the revelation of God. And when, from this glorious subject, I turned to read the cold, the sickening cavils of the infidel,—when I looked to see the ruthless sophistry with which he tried to deface and blast every hope and consolation of the soul,—I felt that no powers which I possessed could do any justice to the contrast,—yea, and I feel now, that though I could speak with the tongue of men and of angels, yet I could not present to you, as I would, the surpassing magnitude of the interests which hang upon the book of God.

Read then for yourselves, my brethren. Read with an humble spirit and a docile heart. Read with earnest and sincere prayer, that the Being who dictated, may mercifully teach you to understand and apply his Gospel. There at last you will find the most precious evidence of its truth. There on your knees, you will most surely learn, that the Saviour whose testimony is the spirit of prophecy, is indeed the Giver of life, and light, and joy.

DISCOURSE VI.

Acts, V. 38, 39.

IF THIS COUNSEL OR THIS WORK BE OF MEN, IT WILL COME TO NOUGHT; BUT IF IT BE OF GOD, YE CANNOT OVERTHROW IT, LEST HAPLY YE BE FOUND EVEN TO FIGHT AGAINST GOD.

THE object of our present discourse, my brethren, is to shew that evidence of the truth of Christianity, which is derived from the establishment of the Church. We have set before you, in our previous discourses, the authenticity of the Scriptures, the argument derived from miracles, and that which rests on prophecy. We have examined, by the way, the absurd and impossible schemes of the infidel, in proposing what he presumes would be a better species of proof; and we have found, in every instance, the rank folly, which, under the assumption of superior wisdom, is attempted to be palmed upon mankind. And we now come to consider the evidence of divine truth afforded by the simple fact, that the Church of Christ was built up by the Apostles, in the very face of opposition, and has grown and flourished to the present day, notwithstanding all the assaults of the powers of darkness, and the wit and sophistry of mankind; proving the hand of Deity, according to the reasoning of the text, for if this counsel or this work had been of men, it would have

come to nought; but if it was of God, they could not overthrow it.

Now in order to understand, fully and fairly, this aspect of the question, we shall endeavor to state it in its simplest form. The religion of Jesus Christ is either true or false. We say, that it is the truth of the Eternal and Only Wise God; the infidel replies, Nay, but it is the imposture of men. We ask then, if this were the fact, how could it have been established, at such a time, and by such instruments. We aver, that to account for its success on human principles, is totally impossible; and that to believe it to have been so established, while yet it was a mere imposition, requires an hundred fold more credulity, than is necessary to acknowledge the work to be divine.

We make this assertion in direct reference to the elaborate essay of the famous Gibbon, whose history of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire is familiar to every educated mind, and who has perhaps produced the most specious and plausible of all attempts to account for the establishment and progress of Christianity, on mere human principles. And we shall shew, as we trust satisfactorily, that his argument is entitled to no weight from any sound thinker, notwithstanding the elegance of its dress, and the subtle insinuation of its sophistry. It is indeed no easy task, to compress within the narrow limits of a single discourse, the chief points involved in such a discussion, so as to make them plain and perspicuous to the ordinary hearer; but relying on the guidance and aid of Him, who is the way, the truth, and the life, we address ourselves to the task, earnestly supplicating for you, my brethren, the disposition of candid attention and good will. We all

know the force of prejudice, and the utter uselessness of the clearest reasoning, until the heart be rightly inclined to agree with the understanding. May the Lord be present with us, so that you who are already Christians, shall have your faith strengthened and confirmed; and that you who are as yet unconvinced, if any such there be, may be enabled to embrace, with humble confidence, the Gospel of salvation.

Let us then reflect, in the first place, on the time, the place, and the persons belonging to the rise of Christianity; and thus we shall the better estimate the infidel supposition, that it was an imposture.

The time was that celebrated period called the Augustan age, when the human mind had, perhaps, attained the highest point of literary cultivation; when Rome was settled in repose and peace, as the undisputed mistress of the civilized world;—when the various schools of philosophy had extended their utmost sway, and eloquence and poetry, music and painting, architecture and sculpture, with all the arts of the most refined voluptuousness, had achieved their most perfect victory. The lapse of sixteen centuries did afterwards, indeed, produce many mutations. The obscurity of comparative barbarism spread itself abroad, and brooded over Europe, during a long night of ignorance and superstition. And since the light of the reformation has dissipated the gloom, we deny not that the world has gone beyond all previous history, in some branches of science and the arts. But to this day, the pre-eminence of the Augustan age continues undisputed in the peculiar track of literary culture which concerns the point before us. To this day, their poetry, their oratory, their philosophy, their

history, are studied with delight; and our very children are taught to regard the productions of their genius, as the proudest triumphs of intellectual ambition.

Now then we ask, whether a handful of poor and unregarded men could come into this country with a story as wonderful as that of the Gospel, and persuade any considerable or respectable portion of our fellows to believe and to embrace it, if it were not true? We ask whether any man can for one moment think that in our day, such an imposition could be established and prevail, so as, in a century or two, to become almost universal? And if such an imposition could not possibly succeed now, how could it have succeeded during the Augustan age of Rome, when we know, from the most abundant testimony, that society possessed all the literary refinement required to detect and expose it, in a degree as high, if not higher than ourselves, and when the union of the civilized world under one emperor, and a state of profound peace, gave all men the most ample opportunity to investigate the fraud, and consign it to derision and contempt.

It may indeed be replied, that we have examples, in our own day, of the most extravagant credulity,—false prophets,—leaders of sects and parties,—such as Joanna Southcote of England, and the pretended discoverers of the golden Bible in a neighboring state, and hundreds of fanatics as wild as these,—and so it may be asserted, that the establishment of Christianity proves nothing, since it is easy to find some in every age, ready to adopt any folly whatever. But this is shallow reasoning, for the cases are totally dissimilar. The instances of religious enthusiasm with

which we are best acquainted, did not profess to make war upon all the existing systems, but admitted them,—only modifying, or adding to them, in some few respects. Thus the disciples of the English impostor acknowledged the Christian faith, and erred only in ascribing to her some of the prophecies, which rationally admitted of no such absurd interpretation. So too, the pretended discoverers of the golden Bible admit the Scriptures, and follow the prevailing faith, but add to this, a false and ridiculous claim to a new revelation. Whereas, the Apostles adopted nothing of the system of the day, in the Roman Empire. On the contrary, they condemned it all. Neither did they agree to any of the philosophic schools, but condemned them likewise. Of course, there was no common principle of belief, between them and the Gentile world. There was no prejudice of education, or previous persuasion, in their favor. And, consequently, there was no point on which they could claim the slightest alliance ; but so far from it, that every system existing amongst the heathen, whether of philosophy or of religion, must have been in arms against that Gospel, which openly professed to destroy them all.

Secondly, however, and chiefly,—let it be noted, that we have no account of the rise of any religious imposition, since the period of authentic history, which succeeded beyond the little circle of the first impostor. Such attempts may have a partial influence, but they have never extended far, and never flourished long,—invariably dying away with the next generation. How then, can they be compared with the establishment of Christianity, which took such deep and firm root, as to fill the Roman Empire, and flourish with increas-

ing vigor to the present hour? The contrast only shews us, the more plainly, the truth laid down in the text,—that 'if this counsel or device be of men it will come to nought, but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it.'

But it may be objected again, that the rise of Mahometanism proves how easily men may be deluded to such an extent, as to plant a false system amongst whole nations, and perpetuate it for twelve centuries in succession; and hence, it may be argued that the Apostles might have succeeded as well with a fraud, as with a divine revelation.

Here again, however, the reflecting mind sees the total want of similarity. For first, let it be observed, that Mahomet did not assault all the existing systems of his day, because he took a certain portion of his scheme from both the Jew and the Christian. He acknowledged Moses and the Prophets, and also acknowledged Christ as the Messiah of God. Secondly, we must remember that his system was not broached in the Augustan age,—when refinement, learning, philosophy, and peace were flourishing together,—but six hundred years afterwards, when the Roman Empire had been dismembered, when the irruptions of barbarism had defaced the fairest monuments of science, and the darkness of ignorance and superstition had already begun its reign, even in the Church itself.

Thirdly, and principally, let it be observed, that Mahomet had no success beyond his own immediate connexions, until he took up the sword of slaughter, and that all the important conquests of the Koran are written in blood. Fourthly, and lastly, let it be specially marked, that Mahomet did not establish his

system by any appeal to miracles or prophecy. Impostor as he was, he did not dare to lay claim to the works performed by the Apostles. Comparatively dark as was the age, and comparatively barbarous as were the people amongst whom he lived, he did not dream of planting a new religion by appealing to facts,—public and notorious facts,—which never happened. So that this case, when properly considered, only serves the more to shew the utter impossibility of the Apostles planting the Church of Christ, in the period of the highest literary renown, and in the face of every existing system, by the mere appeal to facts,—if their system had not possessed the only confirmation on which they relied,—viz. the indisputable truth of those facts, and the visible manifestation of the hand of God in support of their doctrine.

We recur then, to what we think the simplest form in which to place this question. Is it possible to believe that a dozen men could go through the towns and cities of our own land now—preach that we were all deceived—all mistaken,—that our worship should be abolished—our temples destroyed—our teachers abandoned,—that our whole system of religious knowledge was an abomination and a lie, and that if we continued it, we should do so at the peril of our souls' perdition,—is it possible that these men,—thus making war on all we had been accustomed, from infancy, to believe and revere, and rousing every preacher and public instructor in the land against them,—should be able to persuade us that they alone had the knowledge of God, by pretending to work miracles, without the power? And when, in every place, a portion of our people had been so enraged by their plain dealing,

as to stone, and scourge, and imprison them,—could they so juggle with the senses of the rest, as to prevail upon them to adopt their system by mere deception? And is it possible that, in this enlightened age, a little company of men could, in this way, actually succeed in planting their opinions, so as to form a Church in every place throughout our country; always persecuted, always abused, always opposed, always appealing to supernatural powers, which never could be counterfeited by the united ability of man, and always more or less successful, never discovered nor betrayed,—and yet, that after all, such men should be nothing more than a band of knavish impostors? Now it seems to our mind, that any one who can believe such a fraud possible in our day, must have taken leave of his senses. And we aver, that it was equally impossible in the Augustan age, when Christianity was established; for a period more enlightened, more refined, more philosophical, more sceptical, more equal to our own in every intellectual power, the history of our world has never seen.

2. But the impossibility of such a fraud, at such a period, becomes yet more glaring, when we recollect the place in which Christianity arose, namely, Judea. For Gibbon himself describes the Jews as a base and disregarded people. 'The sullen obstinacy' says he 'with which they maintained their peculiar rights and unsocial manners, seemed to mark them out a distinct species of men, who boldly professed, or who faintly disguised, their implacable hatred to the rest of human kind.' 'According to their maxims of universal toleration,' continues he, 'the Romans protected a

superstition which they despised.' * And this contemptuous sentiment of Greece and Rome towards Judea, is strongly intimated in the well known line of Horace, where, alluding to what he considers incredible, he says,—'let the circumcised Jew believe it, not I.' The general odium and ridicule, therefore, which attended the Jewish character among the polished and refined heathen of that period, was a strong additional obstacle to the establishment of the Church. And a system of faith and obedience which acknowledged the God of Israel as the only living and true God,—which referred to the Prophets of Israel, and sought for salvation through the atonement offered by Christ,—a crucified Jew, according to the flesh,—a system which gave the first rank to the stock of Abraham, and considered the Greeks and Romans as only grafted upon that stock, and made Jerusalem the type and the depository of every thing excellent and glorious upon earth,—surely it is obvious that such a system must have been utterly repugnant to the national pride of every Greek and Roman; and this very circumstance,—the general contempt and odium connected with the place in which the Gospel arose,—must have doubly sharpened every prejudice, and rendered any attempt at imposture more desperate than ever.

3. We recur, thirdly, to the consideration of the persons by whom this revelation was established. In questions of religion, the world had been accustomed, for ages, to take its ideas from priests and kings, from law-givers and sages, whose power, or learning, or

* Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. 1 p. 394.

reputation, gave their opinions weight and dignity. And at the period of which we are speaking, if twelve illustrious philosophers had discovered the sublime mysteries of Christian truth, and had united in propagating them, with all the powers of genius and the influence of character, it might not have been so wonderful that they should have succeeded in establishing some of the principles of the Gospel morality, though we cannot see how they could have succeeded in producing a belief of the Gospel facts. The first Church, we must remember, was gathered at Jerusalem, the very place where the astonishing life, miracles, and death of Christ were publicly known, and where, if they had not been publicly known, no possible combination of deceivers could have persuaded the people that they had seen them. From Judea, the truth and the miracles of the Apostles went together, into all the civilized world; and had they been the greatest men who ever saw the light, they could neither have displayed the miraculous powers, nor proved the extraordinary facts, on which the Gospel was founded, if these powers were only a pretence, and if those facts were only the product of their own invention. But when,—instead of being philosophers, or orators, or priests, or kings,—we behold their humble origin, their ignorance, their simplicity, their total deficiency in those appearances and qualities which command the esteem or applause of men, and their constant appeal to facts, plain incontrovertible facts, instead of eloquence, or artifice, or argument,—we see how utterly absurd is the allegation that such were the men who were able to deceive the world, and establish the Church upon the basis of their own imposture.

But, beside these considerations of the period at which, the place where, and the persons by whom, the Church of Christ was thus firmly and permanently erected, let us not forget the terrible obstacle of fiery persecution, and the personal renunciation of sin and worldly indulgence, and the severe self denial, and the separation from family, and friends, and home, and kindred,—connected with the first profession of the Christian faith. These circumstances alone, go to shew the impossibility of the Apostles being deceivers, for why should they wish to deceive, when they could hope for no other reward than these? But the same circumstances go equally to demonstrate the impossibility of their succeeding in imposing a deception on mankind, since the fact that such difficulties and trials lay in the way of every disciple, must have made all men jealous of the proof, and must have induced a rigid examination of the sincerity of the first heralds of the cross, before which the most accomplished dissembler would have faltered, in confusion and dismay.

After thus glancing at the various circumstances which the wisdom of God selected for his blessed revelation, to shew the candid and honest mind the certainty of its truth, and the utter impossibility of his Church having been established by any system of human management whatever, we now turn to the reasons assigned by the infidel historian already named, which he considers sufficient to account for the success of Christianity, on human principles. These are, in his own words, 'first, the inflexible and intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit, which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentiles from

embracing the law of Moses. Secondly, the doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth. Thirdly, the claim of miraculous powers by the primitive Church. Fourthly, the pure and austere morals of the Christians. And fifthly, the union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Roman Empire.' These five reasons might all be fairly and honestly considered as secondary causes of the progress of the Church; but the historian artfully brings them in, as sufficient to effect its first establishment; and under cover of a mock reverence for the principles of the faith, seeks to subvert it by the most dexterous yet fallacious sophistry. We shall now endeavor, briefly, to shew the worthlessness of his argument, when applied to the point in question, viz. the truth of the Christian system, derived from the firm establishment of the Church by the Apostles.

1. The first cause which he assigns for the establishment of the Church, namely, the zeal,—the inflexible, and as he calls it, the intolerant zeal of the primitive Christians,—is evidently the effect of their religion. They could not have been zealous for the Gospel until they had embraced the Gospel. How did it happen that their zeal was so great, if their faith was not strong? And seeing that the first Church was established in Jerusalem, on the very spot where the Redeemer lived and died,—how should their faith have been strong, if they knew themselves to be engaged in establishing a lie, which exposed them to so many sufferings in this life, and which assuredly would not profit them in the life to come? This question, which

is the true point at issue, the infidel historian does not pretend to answer.

2. The second human cause assigned by Gibbon for the success of the Christian Church, is the doctrine of a future life. He details, very fully and candidly, the darkness and uncertainty of the wisest heathen philosophers, on the subject of the soul's immortality, and acknowledges, that notwithstanding the sublime speculations of the Platonic school, in the days of Cicero and the first Cæsars, 'at the bar and in the senate of Rome, the ablest orators were not apprehensive of giving offence to their hearers, by exposing that doctrine as an idle and extravagant opinion, which was rejected with contempt by every man of a liberal education and understanding.'

We confess ourselves unable to comprehend, from these premises, the conclusion of Gibbon, stated a little after in these words, that 'when the promise of eternal happiness was proposed to mankind, on condition of adopting the faith and of observing the precepts of the Gospel, it is no wonder that so advantageous an offer should have been accepted by great numbers, of every religion, of every rank, and of every province in the Roman Empire.' For it seems to us that if, as he correctly states, this doctrine was previously rejected with contempt, as an idle and extravagant opinion, by the philosophic and refined portion of the Gentile world, it must have formed rather an objection to the progress of Christianity, and have excited, at its first annunciation, the same derision of which we read in the book of the Acts, when St. Paul preached at Athens. But be this as it may, the question recurs, how did the Apostles prove and establish a doctrine, which Plato

and his followers had attempted in vain, if they were only a set of impostors? How did the first preachers overcome the contemptuous derision of the Gentiles, and induce them to embrace this very doctrine in its most sublime extent, if they were not in truth armed with a kind of demonstration altogether superior to any human ability? Here again, is the substantial enquiry, which the infidel historian totally evades.

3. The third argument assigned by this subtle antagonist, for the establishment of the Church, is the power of miracles ascribed to the first Christians; and this he artfully endeavors to discredit, by confounding the real miracles by which the Gospel was first attested, with the subsequent records of superstition and credulity. But the Augustan age of Rome was no time for twelve poor and illiterate men to pull down existing systems, by deceiving the world with a pretence of this description. The rage and prejudice of the Jews afforded no favorable audience for the display of pious frauds; and there is the widest possible difference between the Apostles claiming and exercising their stupendous commission in the presence of sceptics and enemies, in order to build up the Church, and their successors, magnifying or distorting natural events, by mistake or misrepresentation, long after the Church was established.

4. The fourth cause of the progress of the faith, mentioned by Gibbon, is one, which we should suppose enough, of itself, to prove the truth and divine authority of our religion. It is the acknowledged virtues and holy lives of the primitive disciples. The historian confesses, that 'their serious and sequestered life, averse

to the gay luxury of the age, inured them to chastity, temperance, economy, and all the sober and domestic virtues. The contempt of the world exercised them in the habits of humility, meekness, and patience. The more they were persecuted, the more closely they adhered to each other. And their mutual charity and unsuspecting confidence were often remarked by infidels themselves.'* Nay, the same author adds this strong expression, 'it is an honorable circumstance,' says he, 'for the morals of the primitive Christians, that even their faults, or rather errors, were derived from an excess of virtue.' Now it is an astonishing proof of the power of prejudice, that he should labor to reduce all this to the operation of policy, enthusiasm, and pride. But how did it happen that no other system, except the Christian, has ever produced such a reformation in the most corrupt and flagitious of mankind? How could it be that a scheme of fraud, imposed upon the world by a handful of illiterate pretenders, should have done more for the cause of human morality, than all the wisdom of the most learned and philosophic sages since the world began? Policy, enthusiasm, and pride have always existed amongst men; and every sect has had an equal interest in preserving the appearance, at least, of purity and virtue. But it is the glory of Christianity, that no other religion was ever known, which had the power of purifying and sanctifying the human heart. And this practical efficacy is, of itself, the best demonstration of the origin of our faith. This alone conclusively proves that the system is divine.

---

* Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol. 1. p. 420.

5. The fifth and last cause, assigned by this sceptical writer, for the progress of Christianity, is 'the union and discipline of the Church, which gradually formed an independent and increasing state in the heart of the Empire.' How far this might have contributed to such a result, after the Church became fully established, we shall not enquire; but certain it is, that no such principle could have assisted its commencement, for the very plain reason that Christian societies must have been extensively organized, and increasing during many years, before their union and discipline could have made any impression on the world in general; nor are we sure, that this impression could have drawn half as many towards the Church, as the fear of persecution would have probably driven from it, during the three first centuries. The argument, however, is not worth discussing, because it has no bearing upon the point at issue; for the question is not what sort of impression the Church made upon mankind, after its establishment, but how it became established at all, if the Apostles had not derived their doctrines and their powers from the Almighty.

The lover of truth, then, may rise from the artful assault of this antagonist, with a confirmed assurance that no man can fairly evade the demonstration which the Christian system claims, on this ground alone. The infidel historian, with all his learning, his dexterity, and his management, presumes not to dispute that the Church was established at the very time and by the men recorded in the Scriptures. He presumes not to dispute that it spread through the whole Roman Empire, which then included the entire civilized portion of the globe, within a very brief period. He recognizes

the complaint of the heathen Lucian, in the first century, that his native country Pontus, 'was filled with Epicureans and Christians,' and the statement of Pliny, who writes to the emperor Trajan, within eighty years after the death of Christ, that 'the heathen temples were almost deserted, that the sacred victims scarcely found any purchasers, and that Christianity had not only infected the cities, but had spread itself into the villages and the open country.' All this he admits, for in his character of historian he could not controvert it. And when he tries to account for the astonishing fact, he does not suggest one solitary reason for the success of the faith, which impugns its divine original; nor can he find one single hypothesis to shew how, by any possibility, the Apostles could have consented to become martyrs for the sake of palming a falsehood upon mankind, or how they could have succeeded in such a wild attempt, even had they been so insane as to undertake it.

Here then, my brethren, we may rest this branch of the evidence of Christianity, securely. One of the very first historians, writing on the precise point, himself a determined infidel, cannot deny that the Apostles did establish the Church of Christ, during the Augustan age, not only in Judea, but in the most refined and polished cities of Greece and Rome. He cannot deny that they did it, without human eloquence or power, without influence or character, without science or learning,—nay, in the very face of all these, in the teeth of opposition, in spite of all the odium which Jewish rage and Gentile calumny could heap upon them, in spite of the most bitter persecutions, in spite of ridicule, and hatred, and laws, and councils, and

prisons, and scourgings, and the most cruel deaths. He cannot deny, that the Apostles planted the Church by appealing to plain facts, facts of which the most ignorant could judge as well as the most learned, and facts of such a nature as precluded the possibility of imposition—the life, the miracles, the crucifixion of Christ,—the establishment of the Jerusalem Church by the public miracles of the day of Pentecost,—the marvellous powers forthwith claimed and exercised by the Apostles,—the gifts of tongues and prophecy, conferred on others by the laying on of their hands,—the innumerable miracles of healing, performed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,—all these were notorious,—they were the weapons of the apostolic warfare,—they were the seals of the apostolic commission,—they were the simple but irresistible means by which the Church was planted; and since it was thus planted, it has flourished and grown in defiance of the same opposition. The grain of mustard seed which was once the least of all seeds, has become a great tree, overshadowing the best and fairest portion of the globe. The stone cut out of the rock, without hands, has become a great mountain, and is fast filling the earth. If it had been the counsel or work of man, it must have come to nought; but it was of God, and therefore men could not overthrow it. They did their utmost. The heathen raged,—the people imagined vain things,—the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed. But he that sitteth in the heavens laughed them to scorn;—the Lord had them in derision. The policy of governments failed,—the rage of persecution ceased,—and the Church rose up, while

all other institutions were crumbling into ruin. The sceptres of monarchs were broken,—their crowns were trodden in the dust,—the names of whole nations were blotted from the memory of man,—but the Church of Christ stood firm amidst the general desolation. The laws of other days were buried,—the literature of other days was banished,—the arts and sciences of other days were forgotten,—Europe was plunged for centuries into feudal darkness,—the Jews, who crucified the Redeemer, were scattered by the Gentiles, and the Gentiles, who once opposed the religion of God, were forced, in turn, to bow down to the savage hordes of the North, and every trace of refinement and social elevation, withered away; but still, the Church remained secure. She conquered the conquerors. She converted and softened the ferocious spirit of the Vandal and the Goth; and the pride and fierceness of triumphant barbarism fell prostrate in penitence, beneath the cross of Christ. Yea, more than all,—the Church grew and flourished in spite of her own corruption. Ambition and strife disturbed her ancient moderation, and erected a tyrannical hierarchy over the kingdom of the Saviour. Her doctrine became clouded by the inventions of man,—her worship became stained by frauds and superstition,—her priesthood excited the general indignation by their vice and immorality,—and all things betokened the speedy reign of impiety and atheism. But the might of God cast off the chains of human presumption; the glorious reformation restored the scriptural standard of apostolic purity, and the Church of Christ was established as the pillar and ground of the truth, in all the beautiful attire of her primitive simplicity. And still the Church

advances, notwithstanding the heavy disadvantages of sectarian animosity and party zeal. Still the gates of hell cannot prevail against her, notwithstanding the combined force of outward assaults and internal divisions. The Church of Christ is working her way in the midst of Mahometanism, and although that system is younger by seven centuries, and has been protected by the united powers of ignorance and despotism, yet is it tottering to its fall. The Church of Christ is diffusing her salutary influence among our native Indians, among the debased Africans, among the Chinese, and the thousand varieties of idolatry which infest the East. Her strength increases in every country, hitherto called Christian. Her influence is becoming more extensive in our own land. On the list of her defenders, we can number the brightest names of mortal renown, in genius, in science, in learning, and in virtue; and every human accomplishment, and every trophy of intellectual supremacy, have arrayed themselves in glad subordination to the principles of the Christian faith.

What then, we ask once more,—what could have achieved this victory, but the power of God? What but his wisdom, and his might, could have built his Church on the efforts of the poor fishermen of Galilee, and preserved, and increased, and prospered it in this marvellous manner, for eighteen centuries together? God knows how little the sagacity or contrivances of men could have done, to establish such a system. God knows how imperfectly, at best, his servants have fulfilled their duty, and how often their folly, their weakness, and their crimes, have retarded and kept down the progress of his truth. Yea, and even to this hour, small indeed is

the share which we can claim, in the triumphs of the Gospel. But, considered simply as a question of evidence, it is better that it should be so; for thus the work may be seen, the more plainly, to be divine. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.' 'Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be the glory and praise, for thy mercy and truth's sake.'

Let us then, my beloved brethren, render thanksgiving and honor to the blessed condescension of the Almighty, which has thus erected the Church of the Redeemer, at such a time, and by such instruments, as to place its celestial origin beyond the reach of honest doubt. And let us acknowledge, with humble gratitude, the unspeakable privilege of having its early history so clearly recorded, and its primitive worship and doctrine so purely preserved. Let us rejoice that the ministry ordained by the Apostles has descended in an unbroken succession to our own day. Let us rejoice that the sacraments ordained by Christ himself, are still administered amongst us in all the pure simplicity of their first institution. Let us dwell with increasing affection on the sacred writings, addressed to the Churches by the very hands which gathered them from the heathen; and let us imbibe a higher portion of their zeal and holy fervor with each perusal. And as for those who choose the seat of the scorner—the poor unhappy men, who love the darkness of scepticism, and the desolation of unbelief,—well may we compassionate their blindness, and deplore their hardness of heart; but to fear them would be unworthy of our cause. It is, indeed, our solemn duty to defend, yea, if necessary, even to contend earnestly for the faith once committed to the Saints; still, we cannot doubt the issue of the contest,

for this counsel or work is not of men, that it should shrink before the assaults of human opposition. It is of God, and they cannot overthrow it. But alas! why should they expose themselves to the risk of thus fighting against God? For what prize are they contending? What do they gain, even when their cruel sophistry has succeeded in poisoning the understandings and deluding the souls of their unsuspecting victims? What is the miserable triumph worth, which sears the conscience, bursts every moral restraint, and confirms the fearful dominion of the passions; which, at the last sad hour, adds tenfold horror to the sting of death, and finds no better refuge than the wretched hope that the victory of the grave will be eternal? Such is the common reward of unbelief even in the present life: but O God! just, as well as merciful,—engaged as they are in a contest with thee,—what must be the doom which awaits them in the life to come!

Stand then, my brethren, for the cause of truth, against all attacks of infidelity. Stand, as the soldiers of Christ, in the blessed armour of the Gospel, with the shield of faith, and the breastplate of righteousness, having for a helmet the hope of salvation, and girded with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. But contend not in the temper of angry controversy, for the battle is the Lord's, and he demands of us the spirit of meekness and holiness, the spirit of supplication and prayer, the spirit of benevolence and affectionate solicitude for the souls of all men. May his grace guide and direct you! May his truth be your defence and your stay, and may the power and energy of a living faith so operate in your hearts and lives, that his Church on earth may lead you to his Church in heaven!

DISCOURSE VII.

1 Cor. I. 21.

The world by wisdom knew not God.

The defender of Christianity, my brethren, is under no inducement to pass over or disguise the arguments of its assailants. Strong in the celestial truth and justice of his cause, he needs not any of the arts of advocacy; nor would the principles which he professes to espouse, tolerate an advantage gained at the expense of candor. We deem it, therefore, an obvious duty, to notice formally the remaining objections of the most prominent infidel writers, before we conclude these discourses on the evidence of the Christian faith. Our limits will not admit of our entering much into detail, but substantially, though briefly, we hope to dispose of all the supposed reasons which our adversaries offer in their justification; confident that the fault must be our own, if we do not shew how weak and futile they deserve to be esteemed, by every sound and unsophisticated understanding.

The whole of the argument of infidelity resolves itself into two branches of objection, of which the first regards the contents of the Bible itself, the second, the conduct of professing Christians. Let us give to both a cursory examination.

The contents of the Bible are assailed on various grounds.

1. It is said, for example, that the books attributed to Moses and Joshua, could not have been written by them, because they contain an account of their death.

2. It is averred, that the Bible cannot be the book of God, because it contains some passages which are not consistent with modesty.

3. It is insisted, that the commands attributed to the Almighty, to exterminate the Canaanites, are totally at war with his attributes of justice and mercy.

4. It is alleged, that there are many positive contradictions between the various writers of both Old and New Testament, which render their testimony unworthy of belief.

5. And, fifthly, it is assumed, that miracles are opposed to all human experience, and are therefore incredible.

Now in all this, the appeal is professedly made to nature and to reason; and we desire no better tribunal for such a question, if it be only judged with fairness and candor. We do not, indeed, intend to notice every distinct passage which has been made the topic of infidel jest, because this would require a volume. Neither would it avail; for as jests are not arguments, it is idle to ask that argument should answer them. Woe to the mind that mistakes the laugh of skepticism, for the test of religious truth! Still, though we do not design to parley with the man who prefers profane wit to sober reason, we hold ourselves bound to exhibit plain and practical principles, by which all the above, and similar objections, can be put to rest by the sincere enquirer. To none other do we expect that any argument would be satisfactory.

1. We commence with the allegation, that Moses and Joshua could not have been the writers of the books attributed to them, because those books contain an account of their death, at the close; and this is dwelt upon as a serious matter, although the slightest reflection might serve to remove the difficulty. We grant very readily, that Moses and Joshua did not write the account of their own deaths, but that it was added by some other hand, probably the High Priest at the time being, as a part of the sacred history. And what then? Does this brief addition at the end of the five books of Moses, affect his claim to be considered as the writer of the rest? Does the adding of notes or explanations in the margin, or in brackets, or at the end of books in our own day by an editor, destroy the claim of the original author? As readily do we grant that we do not know the writers of many other books of the Old Testament; but how would it increase our confidence in their truth, if we did? Is it not enough for us, that they were admitted in their present shape by the ancient Jews, for centuries before the coming of our Saviour,—that they formed their sacred history, their constitution of government, and their laws,—and that they were transcribed with the utmost accuracy, preserved with the highest care, inspected by all their priesthood and public officers, and not allowed to be copied or expounded, except under the strictest rules and regulations? And thus circumstanced, is it not plain, that whatever explanatory or additional matter was at any time admitted, was authorized by their Prophets, and therefore possesses the same claim to our veneration? The Jews, who have the first right to speak on such a point, refer these and a small list of

other supplementary passages to Samuel and Ezra, and substantiate their authority by the fact, that they were admitted into the Hebrew Canon; and the Christian, besides this ample testimony, derives a conclusive argument from the circumstance, that Christ Jesus and his Apostles continually appeal to the Scriptures in their present form as the infallible record of divine revelation,—thus solemnly authenticating the truth of the whole.

But the infidel overlooks every principle of reason and experience, when he talks of the probability of forgery and imposition, in the production or transcribing of these Scriptures. Who ever heard that the laws and constitutions of a whole nation had been forged by deceit, altered by stealth, or corrupted by private management? The thing is impossible. And for this very reason it is, as we may reverently conceive, that the Scriptures of the Old Testament were of so mingled a character, presenting at one view not only the history of Israel, and their religion, but their code of civil government, so singularly combined together, that it was impracticable to separate them, and equally impracticable to keep them from the knowledge, not merely of the priests, but also, of the judges and the people at large. To the books of Moses the Levites were obliged continually to recur, as the foundation of their whole system, settling their duties to the other tribes, and the duties of those tribes to them. To the same books the judges of all Israel were obliged to have the same constant recourse, as the code of law which decided every dispute, and determined every controversy. To the book of Joshua the whole nation had special regard, because the boundary lines of the allotment to the several tribes were recorded

there. And hence it is plain, that the gratuitous supposition of fraud in the production or the preservation of these writings is the most preposterous and wild. As well might men talk of the admission of forgery or unauthorized additions in the Constitution of the Union, or the laws of the land; or persuade us, that the legislative divisions of our states into counties and townships were a piece of private or priestly imposition. To the Israelites, the books of Moses and Joshua stood in this precise relation. They were the great national records not only of their history, but of their constitution and their laws; and the division of Canaan amongst the twelve tribes depended on their authority. And when it is remembered that the people of the Jews, at the time of their departure from Egypt, were more numerous than the inhabitants of any one of the United States, surely a refusal to place credit in their records, which combined all that was most dear to them, in history, polity, and religion, is utterly opposed to every dictate of common sense.

Neither is the objection, that we do not know the authors of the supplementary additions or notes to these books, of any weight, in the proper aspect of the question, for this simple reason, viz., that in the public records of the history, laws, and constitution of nations, authorship has no necessary connexion with truth. Who knows the author of the English Magna Charta, or Bill of Rights? Of what importance is the enquiry, whether the American Declaration of Independence were the work of one man or of twenty? Or how does it concern us, to know the actual writer of any of the charters or constitutions of the several states, or the actual proposer of any of our acts of legislation?

Here, therefore, we see a plain distinction, which any mind of sense and reflection can easily perceive. The question of authorship is undoubtedly important in private books, because in such case, without some name there is no personal responsibility. But in public records—in the acts or archives of nations, authorship is nothing but a point of curiosity. Our confidence in these is not founded on the personal responsibility of any individual, but on the recognition of the government; and hence, if there be any principle in evidence universally established amongst men, it is this, that the records of nations, laid up and recognized by their existing governments, are above all other proof, and do not, in their nature, admit of any equal demonstration.

2. We proceed to the second head of objection, that the Bible contains many passages unworthy of the character of the Deity, as being inconsistent with modesty. This supremely contemptible cavil, hardly deserves a reply. Modesty, in the sense used by the objector, has no connexion with the task of the law-maker or the judge on earth. Crimes must be described or they cannot be punished. Testimony of their commission must be given or they cannot be detected. And would the sickly and mawkish affectation of infidel modesty check the law of the Most High God in describing and forbidding iniquity, while the laws of men, and the administration of them is to be unrestrained? Is the record of the Divine will to be fettered, while the record of the human legislator is to be free? Truly these profound caviliers would do well to petition our own law-makers to cut down the statute book to the standard of this modest legislation,

and expurgate all the histories of the world, and blot out of our dictionaries a large proportion of our language, and let vice and debauchery stand unreproved, lest a wound might be inflicted on their sensitive delicacy. But no! These gentlemen have no objections to describing things as they are, except when they think it may serve their turn in vilifying the Bible. Their modesty is under no alarm when books and conversation, poetry and music, sculpture and painting, and all the inflaming and meretricious arts of the drama, are at work to excite the fancy and corrupt the heart. But let them set their minds at rest, by this simple reflection,—That is the most modest book, which makes the readers of it modest. And in vain will they look for this or any other pure and chaste quality on earth, if they do not find it in those who are the constant and faithful students of the book of God.

3. The next cavil which meets us, is the allegation, that the command given to exterminate the Canaanites, is totally at war with the justice and mercy of the Almighty,—women and children being sacrificed by the Israelites, and they being forbidden either to pity or to spare. Now let us bring this favorite accusation to the test of reason, and let us ask, what is the usage adopted in human wars, and the command given by human governments, against those who are the public enemies, or those who violate their laws?

If women and children be, as they frequently are, on board an enemy's ship, does that form an argument why she should not be destroyed? If women and children be, as they always are, in a besieged town, does that prevent the assault by artillery, the scattering

bomb-shells amongst the houses, the blowing them up by a mine, or the reducing it by famine, although in all these cases the war is as much directed, in fact, against the women and children as against the men? Nay, in any instance, is it possible that war can be carried on without injuring the women and children, and often to a degree infinitely worse, to a mind of any virtue, than death itself? And yet, do the sufferings of these women and children ever enter into the calculations of earthly governments, or was sympathy for them ever yet known to arrest the voice or palsy the arm of national retribution? Alas! how much is it to be lamented, that the philanthropy—like the modesty of the infidel, should be found in such active exercise only when he inveighs against the Bible!

But this is not the worst of the unbeliever's inconsistency. In one instance of the Jewish wars, it is recorded by the sacred historian, that it pleased the Almighty to order the virgins of Midian to be spared; and behold! the infidel triumphs in the discovery, that these maidens were to be the instruments of vice, and brings this as another charge against the Scriptures. Here we see the ingenious double-dealing of such minds. When God commands the women to be kept alive, they invent an evil design and exclaim, How abominable! And when he commands them to be slain, they are equally offended and cry out, How cruel! So that they are determined the Bible must be wrong, let it record what course it may.

We may not dismiss this topic, however, without placing it in its plainest and most simple light. The Canaanites were an abandoned, flagitious, and horribly depraved people. In the strong language of the sa-

cred record, the very land had become sick of its inhabitants, and the Israelites were commissioned by the express command of the Almighty Sovereign, to destroy them, for this reason and no other. Will the infidel presume to say, that God was not just in cutting off such a people by any instrument which he saw fit to employ? Suppose he had done it by a deluge as of old,—would the waters have spared the women and children? Suppose he had done it by pestilence,—would the plague have spared the women and children? Suppose he had done it by famine, or by lightning,—would these have spared the women and the children? In the year A. D. 79 the city of Herculaneum was buried by lava and ashes in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius; and in 1755 the city of Lisbon was desolated by an earthquake, by which thirty thousand lives were destroyed as in a moment. Did these messengers of the wrath of God make any discrimination in the age or sex of their victims? Nay, does not the Supreme Governor cut off women and children by death, every day? And will the infidel deny the agency of God in the whole system of earthly things, for the sake of sustaining this miserable affectation of sympathy, in opposition to the Bible?

Plain therefore it is, that the command to slaughter all the Canaanites, on account of their horrible wickedness, was only in consistency with what we know of all the other judgments of God; and the only question that can be raised, is—Whether it was not merciful in him to appoint the chosen people as his instruments, rather than the flood, or the famine, or the plague, or the earthquake, for the express reason which he himself assigns, viz., to teach them a lesson of admonition

against the same crimes, lest his indignation should visit them also. The principle here is precisely the same with that which earthly governments adopt, when they direct the rebel or the murderer to be executed by the officer of the law as a warning to the community. And if it be right that the sheriff should execute his guilty and condemned fellow-being, at the voice of an earthly judge, how should it be otherwise than right, that a nation should destroy a guilty and condemned people, at the voice of the Eternal Judge of earth and heaven?

4. In the fourth place, however, the infidel tells us that the Bible cannot be the truth of God, because it is full of contradictions. In proof of this assertion, he appeals to many passages both of the Old and the New Testament, where the same event is related in different ways; and this variety he is pleased to call contradiction. But this argument is as destitute of fairness and common sense, as any of the others. So far is it from being the fact that several persons, telling the same story, will always tell it the same way, if it be true, that we defy the most ingenious infidel to tell the same story twice in the very same words, unless he writes it down and commits it to memory for the express purpose. We care not who tries the experiment, or when, or how often. Any man that pleases may take any domestic or public narrative, and tell it every day in the same week, or even six times in the same day, and we aver, that however true it may be, and however truly he may state it, yet he will not relate it twice in precisely the same manner. Much more when different persons relate the same event or conversation, may they be expected to vary in their

language, yet without any disagreement which amounts to contradiction. And hence the familiar experience of courts of justice, that where a number of witnesses give their testimony concerning the same fact, they never fail to represent it differently, unless where they are perjured, or take their lesson from each other. Neither are men ever held to precise verbal accuracy, even in citing the sentiments of others in books, unless when they profess to quote the very words, either by the use of quotation marks, or by stating this to be their intention. It is absurd, therefore, and in the teeth of all human usage and analogy, to ask this verbal accuracy in the Bible. Variety we ought to expect there, as in all the other works of the same divine hand. There cannot be found two expressions of Almighty power in the human race, precisely similar in mind, face, or person, since the creation. There cannot be found even two leaves precisely alike, on the same tree. And greatly should we lose, instead of gaining, if we had the dull and mechanical uniformity for which the infidel contends, instead of the beautiful and harmonious variety which characterizes the works of God, not only in the book of Grace but in the book of nature.

While we acknowledge, therefore, and are grateful for this variety, we utterly repel the charge of contradiction. It needs but very little effort to shew, that all which is called contradiction in the Scriptures can be easily reconciled, so as to stand perfectly together. Our limits will not allow of our entering at large into this topic, but we shall state one example which may serve as a rule for many.

In the genealogy of our Saviour, which is given both

by St. Matthew and St. Luke, there is a striking discrepancy, furnishing a favorite theme for the despisers of the Gospel. Both of these lists commence with Joseph, that of St. Matthew calling him the son of Jacob, and that of St. Luke saying that he was of Heli, omitting the word 'son'; and here, exclaims the infidel in triumph, is a complete contradiction, for how can any man have two fathers—how can Joseph be the son of Jacob and of Heli too? These sagacious gentlemen needed only to have reflected upon the most common thing in the world, to have answered their own objection. And that is the simple fact, that every married man has two fathers,—one his proper father, the other the father of his wife, otherwise called his father-in-law. And as it was the invariable custom of the Jews never to insert the names of females in their genealogies, therefore St. Luke sets down the name of Mary's father, who had by marriage become Joseph's father likewise, and so pursues the line of descent belonging to the mother of our Lord, in order to prove that whether the genealogy was reckoned to Joseph or to Mary,—whether according to the legal or the actual descent,—still the Redeemer was the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, through David the King of Israel, according to the Prophets. Alas! that the determined hostility of unbelief should imagine itself justified by a difficulty, which it needs so very little knowledge and reflection to do away!

5. We come, next, to the last general objection to the Bible, which is the famous sophism of David Hume, that miracles are opposed to all human experience, and are therefore not to be believed on the strength

of human testimony, because it is much more probable that men should lie, than that God should interrupt the order of nature. This celebrated absurdity only requires a little calm examination in order to demonstrate its total unreasonableness. That we may consider it fairly, let us ask first, what is the probability of the miracles recorded in Scripture, and next, what is the experience to which the infidel philosopher appeals.

As to the probability of the miracles recorded in Scripture, how should any man be so dishonest as to state it only as an enquiry, whether it was more likely that men should lie, or that God should work a miracle? The fair and candid reasoner regards the miracles, not as they are in themselves, but as they stand connected with the general purpose of the divine revelation; and therefore the true question is this, whether it is more likely that God should create men for the purpose of directing and guiding them to happiness by the communication of his own will, or that he should create them for no end whatever, beyond the trifling occupations, and toils, and miseries of three score years and ten,—whether it is more reasonable to think that the Almighty takes an interest in the creatures of his power, and designs to make them pure, holy, and blessed beings, or whether he cares nothing for us, regards us not, and delivers us to all the disorders of body and of soul which we see and feel, without condescending to hold any communion with us, or to lead us into any knowledge by which we may rise above the evils of our present lot, into a more exalted condition. Now we hold the probability of this question to be altogether against the infidel hypothesis. Yea, we

hold it to be so far from probable, that the great and glorious God who made us, would leave us destitute of the knowledge of his will, that the very first thing which we should expect, after the creation of a being such as man, would be a revelation imparting a knowledge of his creator.

But there is another mode of stating the probability of the question, which in all justice belongs to it, although it is carefully put out of sight in the delusive sophistry of Hume. Christianity is established ;—that is not to be denied. The Church is extended far and wide ;—infidelity itself cannot gainsay that proposition. Now how did it thus take possession of the world? Is it more unlikely that God should work miracles in support of his own truth, than that a handful of ignorant fishermen should produce such a work by lies and imposition, only for the singular pleasure of dying as martyrs to their own fraud? Is not the tendency of the Gospel holy, just, and good? Is it not expected to improve the human character, wherever it is sincerely professed? Does it not inculcate the purest, the most benevolent, the most endearing, the most exalted morality? And is it more likely that the Apostles should have invented and propagated such a system as this, in the midst of falsehood and imposture,—that they should have lived in vice in order to teach virtue, and committed forgery in order to inculcate truth,—is all this more probable than that God, the merciful and good, should have commissioned them to promulgate his will amongst his creatures? So far from it, that all the probabilities of the question are on the other side, and nothing seems to my mind more absurd as well as unfair, than the infidel's mode of presenting the question.

We wish not, however, to recapitulate an argument, which was exhibited in its proper place; and, therefore we proceed to Mr. Hume's statement that experience is opposed to miracles. But in order to understand him, we must first ask, what does he mean by this word experience? Does he mean his personal experience, or the experience of the world for the previous sixteen hundred years, or the experience of the world since the beginning? If he means that *he* has never seen any miracles, we willingly believe him; but what has that to do with Christianity? The Bible, we apprehend, does not assert that the miracles of Christ were exhibited to David Hume; so that here, at least, he cannot allege any contradiction. If he means that the experience of the world for the last sixteen hundred years, has seen nothing of the kind, this may also be true, but it has just as little to do with the enquiry as the other.

But if he means that the experience of the world from the beginning is opposed to miracles, it is plain that he begs the whole question, and takes the very thing for granted which is in issue. In this sense of the term, *experience*, we deny the proposition altogether, and assert the direct reverse. The experience of the world from the beginning is in favor of miracles. All nations have believed in them. All classes of men have believed in them. And although there have been many false pretensions of the kind, just as there are many false gods, yet this fact only serves to show that there must have been some real miracles, or else there would have been no false ones, for what should have induced mankind to imitate what did not exist? If the Deity had never manifested his power in this way, how

should the first idea of it have been introduced into the world? Surely it is manifest that the making of a counterfeit always pre-supposes the existence of what is real. But just as the misconceptions and deceits of evil men distorted the being of the only living God into the phantoms of superstition and idolatry, in like manner the same misconceptions and deceits gave rise to a spurious imitation of the wonders wrought by the Deity, and thus deluged the world with false miracles. On this particular subject, a partial experience leads to contradictory results; but when taken in its largest sense, and properly compared and corrected, the same human experience which testifies against false gods and false miracles, testifies in favor of the true God, and of the wonders wrought by the commissioned messengers of his will.

Specious, therefore, as it is, the understandings of men were never duped by a more egregious fallacy than this celebrated sophism of Mr. Hume. Experience can be but of two kinds, first our personal experience, or what we have actually witnessed ourselves, and secondly, the experience of others, or what the rest of mankind say that they have witnessed. If we resolve to believe nothing that we have not seen, to what miserable limits will our knowledge be reduced! The accounts of travellers—the descriptions of geography—the records of history—the discoveries of science—the political events of the day—the administration of government, and the trials of our courts of justice,–yea, the whole conduct of life–all rest on the same principle—reliance on human testimony. Take away our confidence in testimony, and society would be unhinged, and the whole frame of the community

would be razed to its foundation. David Hume might profess what he pleased, but neither he nor any other man was ever so insane as to attempt to practise on his system of skepticism. But if, on the other hand, we admit the testimony of our fellow men as to what we have not seen, (which we all do, of necessity, in order to obtain a view of the whole circle of experience,) we are bound in justice to remember, that through human testimony only, could our knowledge have been acquired. Hence it is manifest that the attempt to set experience against testimony, is like setting an effect against its cause, or a stream against its fountain. The experience of which the infidel philosopher speaks so confidently, is nothing but a limited portion of the history of mankind. But the facts of history are known to us only by the same channel of human testimony, so that the entire process is but a balancing of evidence after all. The whole that can be said with truth is, that the testimony of any thing extraordinary requires to be of extraordinary strength, and that a just proportion should always be demanded between the force of the proof and the nature of the proposition. Had Hume contented himself with saying this, he would have said what is reasonable ; and no Christian would have been disposed to controvert it. The evidences of Christianity shrink not from the utmost rigor of any rational rule ; for the establishment of the Church in the hands of the fishermen of Galilee, and its astonishing extension through the world, are alone conclusive to prove that the work was of God ; and the sublime and glorious design of this religion—the purifying the human heart on earth, in order to fit it for eternity in heaven,—fully

justifies us in the assertion that the miracles of Christianity are as worthy of the power, as the doctrines of Christianity are worthy of the wisdom and goodness of the Almighty.

We come, in the last place, to the main objection of the infidel against our sacred religion, namely, the lives of professing Christians. And here, our adversaries never omit to charge upon the Gospel, all the persecutions—the pious frauds—the hypocritical formalism—the sanctimonious wickedness—and the ecclesiastical abuses—which stained more especially the dark ages of Europe. The inquisition, and the torture, and the stake,—the religious wars, the extravagant fanaticism, and the wild excesses of various enthusiasts,—also come in for their share ; and the unprincipled intrigues and shameless immoralities fastened by historians upon the Church of Rome, are not forgotten. But we ask the adversary of the Christian religion to say whether he can condemn those horrible corruptions more strongly than the precepts of the Gospel condemn them. We ask whether the infidel philosopher can imagine a loftier standard of human purity and virtue, than that which is enjoined in the precepts and example of Christ? And we aver, that instead of his professed disciples having committed these enormities because they understood their religion, they committed them because they understood it not. On the other hand, millions, since the fall, have been reclaimed from vice by its pure and holy influence ; and never yet has it been seen, that the Christian portion of any community was not superior, in all the moral virtues, to the portion which rejected Christianity. Indeed what absurdity was ever greater than the allegation, that guilt should be caused by a system of doctrine which

inculcates a total reformation, which demands a constant effort to imitate the character of God manifest in our nature, which promises, as the reward of our faith and obedience, the pardon of sin and the admission into celestial glory, which preaches the necessity of kindness, forgiveness, and every gentle virtue, which forbids intemperance, strife, licentiousness, and every vice, and denounces eternal destruction on all who love and practice iniquity? That such a system could ever produce crime or be the incentive to evil, is an accusation so absurd, that it recoils with shame upon the head of him who makes it. It is indeed true that there has been far too little of the spirit of Christianity among those who have borne the Christian name. That the transgressions and inconsistencies of the professed disciples of the Saviour have always caused his enemies to blaspheme, is equally true. But God forbid that we should seek to lighten the burden of our reproach, by shifting any part of it upon the religion of the Redeemer. Let the infidel defame us as much as he will, but let the Gospel be justified, nor let the truth of heaven be traduced, on account of the depravity of men.

Still, my beloved brethren, although the argument of the infidel on this point be equally unreasonable and unfair,—although he has a far better right to blame the laws of the land because our citizens do not always obey them, than he has to lay the sins of mankind at the door of that holy religion which forbids all sin, and exhorts us to all that is pure, honest, lovely, and of good report,—still let the accusation, false as it is, stimulate us all to the greater watchfulness and zeal, lest the Saviour be wounded in the house of his friends, by our inconsistent life and conversation.

And may we, by the blessed influence of the Holy Spirit, through the precious atonement of the great Redeemer, be enabled to behold the argument which is now drawn from the worldliness of the Church against religion, converted into one of its best recommendations, by the causing our light so to shine before men that they may see our good works and be led to glorify our Father in heaven.

And now, my brethren, we shall conclude our series of discourses on the external evidences of Christianity, by reminding you of what has been frequently intimated before, that while it is proper and necessary for the disciples of the great Redeemer to understand the general argument which proves the truth of the Gospel, we know too well the nature of unbelief to expect that the objector will be satisfied, or the caviller convinced, by any intellectual aid that we can render him. The real root of the difficulty with the infidel, is a disease of the heart. A rebellious will, a self-righteous complacency, an arrogance of mind, an overweening love of the world, or the indulgence of the passions—these, or some of them, are the usual disqualifications for investigating the truth of the Gospel so as to comprehend, and relish, and embrace it. That it has its difficulties, we shall not deny. What science, even of earthly things, is without them? But we do utterly deny that those difficulties have any real bearing upon the evidences of its truth;—we do utterly deny that a heart, honestly disposed for the search after divine knowledge, was ever yet deterred by them. If, then, we would seek to strengthen our own faith, or prevail in the conversion of others, let us look to him who alone ordereth the unruly wills and affections of sinful men,

for his blessing. Let us remember that the most convincing argument to the careless and irreligious mind, is the spectacle of a pure and consistent example ;—that while controversy has a natural tendency to irritate and inflame, to increase the obstinacy of prejudice, and rivet the stubbornness of pride, prayer will soften, kindness will conciliate, and affection will reclaim. We confess that we have small charity for the tribe of infidel writers, who, not content with their personal skepticism, labor to destroy the faith of thousands, and set their miserable strength in open warfare against the truth and government of the Most High God. We have little compassion for those who make a sport of scattering fire-brands, arrows, and death throughout society, and take pleasure in defacing every hope and blasting every expectation which raises man above the brutes that perish. But for those who are in danger of being deluded by their false and treacherous sophistry, our feelings, my Christian brethren, should be widely different. For them let us watch, and strive, and supplicate the God of all grace, that they may attain to the knowledge of that truth which is alone able to make them wise unto salvation. And may his blessing so guide the course and prosper the efforts of his people, that they may rejoice in the extension of pure and undefiled religion, and not only experience its increasing influence within their own souls, but behold its constant growth among their friends and brethren, until every domestic hearth shall have its altar,—until the Word and Sprit of the Most High shall govern our country and mankind,—until profanity, and vice, and wretchedness shall vanish, and the whole earth be filled with his glory !

CONCLUDING DISSERTATION,

DESIGNED TO EXHIBIT,

IN A CONNECTED FORM,

SOME ANNOTATIONS AND PROOFS,

WHICH MAY TEND TO ILLUSTRATE

THE FOREGOING DISCOURSES.

CHAPTER I.

There are three leading ideas in the first discourse, which seem to demand extraneous support, from the writings of others. First, the darkness and uncertainty which surround our condition without revelation.—Secondly, the manifest inferiority of the claims of Mahometanism, when contrasted with Christianity.—Thirdly the impossibility of finding, amongst philosophers, any safe guide to the knowledge of divine truth. A few extracts on each of these points may be acceptable to the reader.

§ 1. Of the total uncertainty of the mind in its search after truth, without a revelation.

In answer to the question 'Is there any God?' Voltaire, the prince of modern Deists, plainly asserts that the idea of a God cannot be necessary to human nature. 'I remark,' says he, 'that there are nations who have no knowledge of a Creative Deity. These nations, indeed, are barbarians, and very few in number, but nevertheless they are men; and if the knowledge of a God was necessary to human nature, the Hottentot savages would have as sublime an idea as ourselves of a Supreme being. Much more, there is not a child amongst the most civilized people, who has in his brain the least idea of a God. We impress it upon them with difficulty, and they pronounce the word God, often

in their life without attaching to it any fixed idea.'[1] Could any argument of a Christian writer show more plainly the folly of the phrase 'religion of nature'? Can any admission prove, more conclusively, the necessity of a *Revelation*, to teach us the being and the attributes of the Almighty, and the knowledge of his will?

The condition of the unbeliever, in his search after truth, is thus eloquently deplored by Rousseau. 'I meditated,' says he, 'upon the sad lot of mortals, floating upon this sea of human opinions, without helm, without compass, and delivered to their stormy passions, without any other guide than an inexperienced pilot, who is unacquainted with his way, and who knows neither from whence he has come, nor whither he is going. I said to myself, I love truth, I seek her and cannot recognize her; let them show her to me, and I will continue devoted to her. Why does she withdraw herself from the emotion of a heart made to adore her?' 'Although,' continues this infidel philosopher, 'I have often experienced the greatest evils, I have never led a life so constantly disagreeable as in this period of trouble and anxiety, when wandering

---

1 Je remarque, d'abord, qu'il y a des peuples qui n'ont aucune connaissance d'un Dieu créateur; ces peuples, à la vérité, sont barbares, et en très petit nombre; mais enfin ce sont des hommes; et si la connaissance d'un Dieu était nécessaire à la nature humaine, les sauvages hottentos auraient une idée aussi sublime que nous d'un Etre suprême. Bien plus, il n'y a aucun enfant chez les peuples policés qui dans sa tête ait la moindre idée d'un Dieu. On la leur imprime avec peine; ils prononcent le mot de Dieu souvent toute leur vie sans y attacher aucune notion fixe.—*Philosophie*, v. 1. p. 126.

without ceasing, from doubt to doubt, I brought back from my long meditations nothing but uncertainty, obscurity, contradictions upon the cause of my being, and upon the rule of my duties.' [1] This acknowledgment of Rousseau is frank, and deeply instructive. But even Voltaire, when writing his chapter on vice and virtue, was driven to say, 'Would to God that a Supreme Being had indeed given us laws, and had proposed to us rewards and punishments! That he had said to us—This is vice in itself, this is virtue in itself.' [2] Disguise it, therefore, as they may, these out-breakings of internal doubt and distraction shew the state of mind under which, at times, these arrogant dictators suffered. How strange that men should be influenced by a miserable skepticism, which could not satisfy even its public defenders themselves!

---

[1] Je méditois donc sur le triste sort des mortels flottant sur cette mer des opinions humaines, sans gouvernail, sans boussole, et livrés à leurs passions orageuses, sans autre guide qu'un pilote inexpérimenté qui méconnoît sa route, et qui ne sait ni d'où il vient ni où il va. Je me disois: J'aime la vérité, je la cherche, et ne puis la reconnoître; qu'on me la montre, et j'y demeure attaché: pourquoi faut-il qu'elle se dérobe à l'empressement d'un cœur fait pour l'adorer?

Quoique j'aie souvent éprouvé de plus grands maux, je n'ai jamais mené une vie aussi constamment désagréable que dans ce temps de trouble et d'anxiétés, où, sans cesse errant de doute en doute, je ne rapportois de mes longues méditations qu'incertitude, obscurité, contradictions sur la cause de mon être et sur la régle de mes devoirs.—*Emile, tome* 2. *p.* 139.

[2] Plût au ciel qu'en effet un Etre suprême nous eût donné des lois, nous eût proposé des peines et des récompenses! qu'il nous eût dit: Ceci est vice en soi, ceci est vertu en soi.—*Philosophie, tome.* 1. *p.* 194.

Nor is the wretched choice of the unbeliever relieved from this gloomy aspect, even in the lucid pages of the sophist Hume. For mark the conclusion of his researches in the last paragraph of his Natural History of Religion. 'The whole' says he, 'is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny concerning this subject.' What should a sober and reflecting mind think of the pride of human intellect which could induce this gifted writer to cast away the light of God's own providing, for the wretched pleasure of floundering in darkness like this!

The confession, therefore, of the deists themselves, corroborates and fully justifies the description of the admirable Pascal, where, speaking of the natural condition of man, he says 'We wish for truth, and find nothing in us but uncertainty; we seek happiness, and find nothing but misery. We cannot help longing after truth and happiness, and yet we are incapable of attaining either. * * * * Man knows not in what rank to place himself. He is visibly astray, and feels in himself remnants of a happy state which he has lost and which he cannot recover. He seeks every where with inquietude and without success, in impenetrable darkness.' [1] Such, of a truth, is the condition of

---

[1] Nous souhaitons la vérité, et ne trouvons en nous qu'incertitude. Nous cherchons le bonheur, et ne trouvons que misère. Nous sommes incapables de ne pas souhaiter la vérité et le bonheur, et nous sommes incapables et de certitude et de bonheur.

* * * * * * *

L'homme ne sait à quel rang se mettre. Il est visiblement égaré, et sent en lui des restes d'un état heureux, dont il est déchu,

the wisest and most sagacious mortals when they cast aside the truth of the Redeemer's system, in order to have the miserable liberty of constructing their own. No wonder that 'the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God!"

§ 2. Of the comparative claims of the Mahometan religion.

It is alleged in the first discourse, that Mahomet received all that is good in his system from the Bible. A few extracts from the Koran will fully demonstrate this assertion, from his own acknowledgments of Scripture.

For example, Mahomet thus expostulates, in the 5th chapter of the Koran, (page 95 of the Baltimore edition,) "O ye that know the written law, if ye observe not the Old Testament, the Gospel and Scriptures which God hath sent unto you, ye shall be without merit. The Jews, Samaritans, and Christians, all that have believed in God, the resurrection of the dead, and have done good works, shall be exempt from affliction; there is nothing for them to fear at the day of judgment."

Again, speaking in the person of God, as delivering an express message from him, Mahomet says,—(chapter 2nd.)" We inspired knowledge into Jesus the son of Mary, and strengthened him by the Holy Ghost."

Again, (chapter 3. p. 49,) "Remember how the Angels said to Mary, God declareth unto thee a word, from which shall proceed the Messiah named Jesus,

---

et qu'il ne peut recouvrer. Il cherche partout avec inquiétude et sans succès dans des ténèbres impenetrables.—*Pensées de Pasc. tome. 2. p.* 8, 9.

the son of Mary, full of honor in this world, and that shall be, in the other, of the number of intercessors with his divine majesty,"&c.

Again, (chapter 5. p. 100,) "Jesus said to the children of Israel, I come to you with evident signs of my mission from your Lord.—I will heal them that are born blind, and the leprous. I will raise the dead. I am come to confirm the Old Testament,"&c.

With these plain acknowledgments of the general truth of the Bible, Mahomet shews an astonishing perversion of its language in places innumerable. His strange travesty of the birth of Christ,(ch. 19,) his accounts of the future world, (ch. 22, ch. 37, and ch. 56,) his notions of Satan's fall, (ch. 15,) and of David and Solomon, (ch. 34,) with very many other examples, might be adduced to prove either that he had studied the Scriptures with very little care, or under the influence of the strongest self delusion. But we shall state two instances only, as a specimen of this perversion. In chapter 4, speaking of the death of Christ, he uses this language:—"they said" (sc. the Jews) "we have slain the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary. Certainly they slew him not, neither crucified him; they crucified one amongst them, that resembled him."

Again, (ch. 4,) "The Messiah Jesus," saith he, "is a Prophet and an Apostle of God, his word and spirit, which he sent to Mary. Say not there be three Gods. For there is but one God. Praised be God, he hath no Son. Again, (ch. 5,) "Certainly he that saith Jesus is God, is impious." Again, (ch. 6,) "How should he have a Son, who hath no wives?" The confounding the doctrine of the Christian Trinity, with the belief of three Gods, demonstrates the ignorance of Mahomet,

and the grossness of the idea on which the last cited argument is founded, exhibits his characteristic sensuality of apprehension.

One of the many passages, in which he excuses his deficiency in miraculous powers, we cite from chapter 3d. "There be that say, God hath commanded us not to believe Prophets, until their sacrifice be consumed by fire. Say to them, there came to you Prophets heretofore, with miracles that you demanded; you had not slain them, had you been righteous. If they belie thee, know they belied the Prophets that were before thee, that came with miracles and the book of light." See also on the same point, ch. 10. ch. 13. ch. 21. ch. 28.

We add a few extracts to shew that Mahomet relied for his success upon the sword of slaughter, and that throughout, the Koran preached, not peace, good will to men, but war and blood-shed. Thus, (ch. 2,) he says, "Fight for the law of God against them that assault you. Fighting is enjoined you, though it be against your will. To such as believe in God, fight for the faith and hope for his mercy, he is gracious." Again, (ch. 3,) "Do you believe to enter paradise, and that God knoweth not them that fought gallantly. If you die or be slain fighting for the faith, you shall appear before his divine Majesty to be rewarded."

To confirm this code of sanguinary policy, Mahomet carried the doctrine of fatalism to the highest point.—An example of this we find in ch. 3, of the Koran, where he says, "Although you had stayed in your houses and your beds, death would have taken away them that were arrived at the hour of their destiny."

The foregoing extracts are sufficient to prove that the opinion expressed by Tucker, in his Light of Na-

ture, (vol. 4. p. 35,) is not without reason. "We may claim Mahometanism," says he, "as a botchy excrescence or spurious offspring of the Gospel: the professors of it preserve a great veneration for Isa or Jesus, look upon him much in the same light as we do Elias, and pretend that their Prophet was the comforter of whom we have promise in the Gospel; their Koran inculcates some of the most important truths contained therein, and what there is good in it, was borrowed from thence." Let it be remembered that Tucker was no divine; on the contrary, he was a liberal philosopher. But what shall we think of the honesty or candor of those minds, who affect to consider Mahometanism as an independent system, and look upon the Koran as a rival to the book of God!

§ 3. Of the impossibility of finding, amongst philosophers, any safe guide to the knowledge of truth.

Of the innumerable testimonies to the doctrine of the first discourse on this subject, we shall extract a few, beginning with the ancient philosophers, whose discordant sentiments we shall take, for brevity's sake, from the impartial page of Cicero. We quote from the Parisian edition of Lallemand, published in A. D. 1768, and, as in all other cases, we give the original below, in order that the scholar may make, if he will, his own translation.

From his 'Academicorum,' (Lib. 1, XII. 44. page 127,) we transcribe the following, where he speaks of the sentiments of Arcesilas, a later academic. "With Zeno, as we understand him," says he, "Arcesilas, prescribed to himself an universal uncertainty, not from perverseness, nor from the desire of victory, as

indeed it seems to me, but from the obscurity of those things, which led Socrates to the confession of his ignorance, and, before the time of Socrates, Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, almost all the ancients, who maintained that nothing could be understood, nothing could be perceived, nothing could be known; that the senses of men were narrow inlets, that their minds were imbecile, that the race of life was short, and (as said Democritus) that truth was buried in the deep—that all things were held from opinions and established institutions—and nothing was left to truth; in fine that every thing was surrounded with darkness."[1]

"Therefore," continues Cicero, "Arcesilas denied that there was any thing which could be known; * * * * * * therefore he maintained that all things lay hid in mystery, nor was there any thing which could be perceived or understood; from which reasons it was not fit that a man should profess any opinion, nor affirm, nor approve by assent, but always restrain his mind and keep his rashness from every false step. Since this rashness of judgment must be great when either what is false, or what is unknown, is approved,

---

1 "Cum Zenone, inquam, ut accepimus, Arcesilas sibi omne certamen instituit, non pertinaciâ, aut studio vincendi, ut mihi quidem videtur, sed eorum rerum obscuritate, quæ ad confessionem ignorationis adduxerant Socratem, et jam ante Socratem, Democritum, Anaxagoram, Empedoclem, omnes fere veteres: qui nihil cognosci, nihil percipi, nihil sciri posse dixerunt; angustos sensus, imbecillos animos, brevia curricula vitæ, et (ut Democritus) in profundo veritatem esse demersam; opinionibus et institutis omnia teneri; nihil veritati relinqui; deinceps omnia tenebris circumfusa esse dixerunt."

nor is any thing more shameful than that our approbation and assent should run before our knowledge and perception." [1]

To this sect of philosophers, which Cicero says was called the New Academy, David Hume professed his allegiance. "The academics," he tells us, (Enquiry concerning human understanding, § 5,) "always talk of doubt and suspense of judgment, of danger in hasty determinations, of confining within very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. Nothing, therefore, can be more contrary than such a philosophy to the supine indolence of the mind, its rash arrogance, its lofty pretensions and its superstitious credulity. Every passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth, and that passion never is nor can be carried to too high a degree."

If this panegyric were as true as it is beautiful, it would fully justify the choice of the celebrated infidel who sought to identify his name with the honors of skepticism. But we have a far more correct account of that school of philosophy from the shrewd author of the "Light of Nature," (vol. 4, p. 26 of the Cam-

---

[1] "Itaque Arcesilas negabat esse quidquam, quod sciri posset.

* * * * * *

Sic omnia latere censebat in occulto; neque esse quidquam, quod cerni aut intelligi possit: quibus de causis nihil oportere neque profiteri, neque affirmare quemquam, neque assentione approbare; cohibereque semper, et ab omni lapsu continere temeritatem: quæ tum esset insignis, quum aut falsa aut incognita res approbaretur: neque hôc quidquam esse turpius, quam cognitioni et perceptioni assentionem approbationemque præcurrere."

bridge Ed.) where he says, "The latter academics were arrant free-thinkers, never having any opinion of their own, but combatting every body's else.—If you said snow was white, they would prove you mistaken. If you said it was black, they would do as before. If you asked what they thought themselves, they would answer—they could not tell, for it might be either."

But before we close our testimony from Cicero, let us hear him on the subject of the varieties of sentiment amongst the ancient philosophers, on the first principle of all religion, viz. the Being of God. "The greater part of philosophers," says he, (De Natura Deorum, lib. 1, § 2,) have said that there were gods; Protagoras, that he doubted it; Diagoras Melius, and Theodorus Cyrenæus, thought that there were none at all. But those who declared that there are gods, are in such variance and dissention, that only to enumerate their opinions would be a wearisome task."[1]

Proceeding then to give a very brief and masterly detail of the doctrines of several of the ancients, he says, (ch. 22. §42.) "I have set forth not so much the judgments of philosophers as the dreams of madmen: for not much more absurd are those things which, diffused by the strains of the poets, injure by their very sweetness."[2]

---

1 Plerique * * * deos esse dixerunt: dubitare se Protagoras, nullos esse omnino Diagoras Melius et Theodorus Cyrenæus putaverunt. Qui verò deos esse dixerunt, tanta sunt in varietate ac dissensione, ut eorum molestum sit dinumerare sententias."

2 Exposui ferè non philosophorum judicia, sed delirantium somnia; nec enim multò absurdiora sunt ea, quæ, poetarum vocibus fusa, ipsà suavitate nocuerunt:—*De Nat. Deor. Lib.* 1. § 42.

But it may be more instructive to take a specimen of philosophy from Voltaire, if it be only to see how a man may rave ingeniously, with all the advantages and blessings of a revelation surrounding him. "It is only," says he, "by an excess of ridiculous vanity, that men attribute to themselves a soul different from that which animates the brutes. For it is clear that up to the present moment, neither the philosophers nor I, know what is this soul." (Philosophie, tome 1, p. 160, 161.) Again, "it is impossible, they say to me, that matter should think. I do not see this impossibility." (*Ib.*)[1] Again, "not seeing therefore," says he, "that the understanding, the sensation of man, is a thing immortal, who will prove to me that it is so? What! shall I, who do not know the nature of this thing, affirm that it is eternal? and while I refuse immortality to that which animates this dog, this parrot, this thrush, shall I grant it to man, merely because man desires it?"[2]

---

[1] Ce ne peut être que par un excès de vanité ridicule que les hommes s'attribuent une ame d'une espèce différente de celle qui anime les brutes. Il est donc clair jusqu'à présent que, ni les philosophes, ni moi, ne savons ce que c'est que cette âme.—*Philosophie, tome.* 1. *p.* 160, 161.

Il est impossible, me dit-on, que la matière pense. Je ne vois pas cette impossibilité.—*Ib.*

[2] Ne voyant donc point que l'intendement, la sensation de l'homme, soit une chose immortelle, qui me prouvera qu'elle l'est? Quoi! moi qui ne sais point quelle est la nature de cette chose, j'affirmerai qu'elle est éternelle! moi qui sais que l'homme n'était pas hier, j'affirmerai qu'il y a dans cet homme une partie éternelle par sa nature! et, tandis que je refuserai l'immortalité à ce qui anime ce chien, ce perroquet, cette grive, je l'accorderai à l'homme par la raison que l'homme le desire?—*Ib.* 166.

One would suppose that such a writer, arguing against every thing noble and precious in the nature of the human race on the strength of what he calls philosophy, must at least have had a profound respect for the intellects of those philosophers who had preceded him. But so far is this from being the case of Voltaire, that he treats the opinions of nearly all other philosophers, with unqualified contempt. Speaking in one place of the mode in which our ideas originate, he says, "It is here that all the philosophers have made fine romances." [1] And again, he tells his readers, "If we believed that the philosophers had more accurate ideas of human nature, we should be greatly deceived, for if you except Hobbes, Locke, Descartes, Bayle, and a very small number of wise understandings, all the others frame to themselves a particular opinion upon man, as contracted as that of the vulgar, and only still more confused." [2] Now it is worthy of special remark that of the philosophers whom Voltaire excepts, as being '*esprits sages*,' no two agreed either with him, or with each other, on the subject of religion.

But Rousseau, perhaps the most candid of the melancholy tribe of unbelievers, is eloquent upon the miserable characteristics of the philosophic school. "I con-

---

[1] C'est ici que tous les philosophes ont fait de beaux romans.—*Philosophie, tome.* 1. *p.* 147.

[2] Si l'on croyait que les philosophes eussent des idees plus complètes de la nature humaine, on se tromperait beaucoup: car, si vous en exceptez Hobbes, Locke, Descartes, Bayle, et un très petit nombre d'esprits sages, tous les autres se font une opinion particulière sur l'homme, aussi resserree que celle du vulgaire, et seulement plus confuse.—*Philosophie, tome.* 1. *p.* 120.

sulted the philosophers," says he, "I ransacked their books, I examined their various opinions, I found them all proud, dictatorial, dogmatical, even in their pretended skepticism; professedly ignorant of nothing yet proving nothing; each deriding the others, and this last point—common to them all—seemed to me the only one on which they were all right. Triumphing when they attack, they are without vigor in defending themselves. If you weigh their reasons, they have none except for the work of destruction; if you count the voices, each is reduced to his own; they only agree in order to dispute: listening to them was not the way to be delivered from my uncertainty?" [1]

Again, says the same author,—and the confession is of the utmost importance to the knowledge of our intellectual infirmity,—"I conceived that the weakness of the human understanding is the first cause of this prodigious diversity of sentiments, and that pride is the second; * * * * we are ignorant of ourselves, we know neither our nature, nor our active principle—impenetrable mysteries surround us on every side; they are above the region of our sensation—in order

---

[1] Je consultai les philosophes, je feuilletai leurs livres, j'examinai leurs diverses opinions; je les trouvai tous fiers, affirmatifs, dogmatiques, même dans leur scepticisme pretendue, n'ignorant rien, ne prouvant rien, se moquant les uns des autres; et ce point commun à tous, me parut le seul sur lequel ils ont tous raison. Triomphants quand ils attaquent, ils sont sans vigueur en se defendant. Si vous pesez les raisons, ils n'en ont que pour detruire; si vous comptez les voix, chacun est reduit à la sienne; ils ne s'accordent que pour disputer: les ecouter n'etoit pas le moyen de sortir de mon incertitude.—*Emile, tome 2. p.* 140.

to penetrate them, we think that we have intelligence, and we have nothing but imagination."[1]

One extract more, from this writer, and we have done. "If the philosophers," says he, "were in a condition to discover truth, who amongst them would take any interest in it? Each one knows well that his system is not better founded than the others, but he maintains it, because it is his own. There is not one amongst them, who, arriving at the knowledge of truth and falsehood, would not prefer the lie which he has discovered, to the truth discovered by another. Where is the philosopher, who, for his own glory, would not willingly deceive the whole human race? Where is he, who, in the secrecy of his own heart, proposes to himself any other object than to distinguish himself? Provided he raises himself above the vulgar, provided he eclipses the fame of his cotemporaries, what does he ask for more? The essential point in his esteem, is to think differently from others. Amongst believers he is an atheist, amongst atheists he would be a believer."[2]

Such, then, being the opinions of philosophers, on the regard due to the sentiments of each other,—such

---

[1] Je conçus que l'insuffisance de l'esprit humain est la première cause de cette prodigieuse diversité de sentiments, et que l'orgueil est la seconde. * * * * Nous nous ignorons nous mêmes; nous ne connoissons ni notre nature ni notre principe actif; * * * * * des mystères impénétrables nous environnent de toutes parts; ils sont au-dessus de la région sensible; pour les percer nous croyons avoir de l'intelligence, et nous n'avons que de l'imagination.—*Emile, tome* 2. *p.* 141.

Quand les philosophes seroient en état de découvrir la vérité,

being their estimate of their own powers, in the discovery of truth,—such being the endless diversities of their schemes, and the bitter hostility which they wage against every form of infidelity, except their own,—what worse than madness is it to expect them to lead their fellow beings, in the path of safety? True, indeed, Christians have their differences, but not upon first principles. They may vary in minor particulars of construction, but they all point with entire unity of heart and intellect, to the one infallible director, the Revelation of God! They all say, 'Believe that record—Obey that doctrine—and you are safe.' They all say 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to that word, there is no truth in them.'

---

qui d'entre eux prendroit intérêt à elle? Chacun sait bien que son système n'est pas mieux fondé que les autres; mais il le soutient parcequ'il est à lui. Il n'y en a pas un seul qui, venant à connoître le vrai et le faux, ne préférât le mensonge qu'il a trouvé à la vérité découverte par un autre. Où est le philosophe qui, pour sa gloire, ne tromperoit pas volontiers le genre humain? Où est celui qui, dans le secret de son cœur, se propose un autre objet que de se distinguer? Pourvu qu'il s'élève au-dessus du vulgaire, pourvu qu'il efface l'éclat de ses concurrents, que demande-t-il de plus? L'essentiel est de penser autrement que les autres. Chez les croyants, il est athée, chez les athées il seroit croyant.—*Emile, tome* 2. *p.* 141.

CHAPTER II.

The second discourse is mainly occupied by the positive evidence in favor of the Scriptures of the New Testament, furnished by writers of the first ages of the Church. We propose to present a view of these writers, somewhat more in detail, drawn chiefly from the work of the elaborate, learned, and faithful Lardner.

§ 1. Of the Christian authors of the second century, who flourished immediately after the Apostles.

1. St. Barnabas, mentioned in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, as the fellow laborer of St. Paul, left an epistle which is still extant, and in which twenty distinct allusions occur to the sentiments and language of the Gospels.

2. St. Clement, bishop of Rome, the same whom St. Paul mentions in his epistle to the Philippians, has left a piece addressed to the Corinthians. Learned men differ in their judgment as to the time of his consecration, some placing it as early as A. D. 61, and others not till A. D. 91, or 93. But this last would assign the epistle an origin rather more early than the Revelation of St. John, which is placed A. D. 96. This epistle of Clement expressly mentions the epistle of St. Paul, where he says, " Take into your hands the epistle of

the blessed Paul the Apostle ;"[1] and it contains forty-four passages referring to the other books of the New Testament.

3. Hermas, the same mentioned in the epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, is affirmed to be the author of the book called the Pastor or Shepherd of Hermas, published as is supposed, A. D. 92, and read in many of the Grecian Churches. This book contains allusions to twenty-three of the books of the New Testament, in forty-four distinct passages.

4. St. Ignatius was bishop of Antioch in Syria, in the latter part of the first and the beginning of the second century, and was a martyr to the truth during the reign of Trajan, about A. D. 107. Seven epistles of this author are extant, which are generally allowed to be genuine, besides others which some reject as spurious. He expressly mentions St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, and alludes to nearly sixty other passages of the New Testament.

5. St. Polycarp was bishop of Smyrna, and a martyr in the reign of Marcus Antoninus the philosopher, about the year A. D. 169. He addressed a letter to the Philippians, which was read in the Churches of Asia in the days of St. Jerome, and is extant. In this epistle, though short, there are nearly forty references to the books of the New Testament, and they are called Sacred Scriptures, and "oracles of the Lord."

6. Quadratus, mentioned with honor by Eusebius, was one of those who travelled abroad, preaching Christ and delivering the Scriptures of the divine Gospels in the reign of Trajan—about A. D. 112.

---

[1] *Αναλαβετε την επιζολην τυ μακαριυ Παυλυ τυ αποζολυ,*

7. Papias is also mentioned by Eusebius in such wise as to shew that in his time, about A. D. 115, the Gospels of Matthew, and Mark, the Acts and many other books of the New Testament were well known. Nothing from these two, however, has reached our times, and therefore, we cannot place them in the list of direct and independent witnesses.

8. Justin Martyr was a philosopher, converted to Christianity about A. D. 132. In 140 he presented his first apology to the Emperor Antoninus Pius, then went into Asia, where he had the celebrated conference with Trypho the Jew, returned again to Rome, and addressed his second apology to Marcus Antoninus the philosopher, and suffered martyrdom about A. D. 164. The greater part of these works, with some others of the same author, have come down to our time. In his first apology he asserts that the Gospels were publicly read in the assemblies of the Christians, by a person appointed for that purpose. His words are these, 'The memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read according as the time allows; and when the reader has ended, the president makes a discourse, exhorting to the imitation of so excellent things.' The allusions and quotations in the writings of Justin, in which the New Testament is cited or recognized, are very numerous, and embrace portions of three of the Gospels, viz. those of Matthew, Luke, and John, the Acts of the Apostles, the epistle to the Romans, the first to the Corinthians, the epistles to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, the second to the Thessalonians, the epistle to the Hebrews, the second of Peter, and the book of the Revelation.

The author of the epistle to Diognetus, may be taken

as the next ancient writer who bears testimony to the New Testament Scriptures, if, indeed, according to the prevailing opinion, this is not one of the works of Justin himself. The difference of style is no sufficient argument against his claims, for nothing is more common than a marked difference of style in the same writer, at different periods of life, or under different influences of taste or feeling.

9. Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, flourished about the year 170. He was the author of several works, of which only some fragments preserved by Eusebius have reached our time. In one of these he speaks of the Scriptures of the Lord, as attempted to be corrupted by heretics; and he was the author of an epistle to the Nicomedians, in which he opposed the heresy of Marcion and defended strenuously the "rule of truth."

10. Tatian flourished about the year 172. He was the author of many works, of which his oration against the Gentiles is the only one remaining. In this are several references to the Gospels, and he is spoken of by many subsequent writers, as having composed a harmony on the whole four Gospels. He afterwards embraced heretical opinions.

11. Hegesippus, a converted Jew, flourished during the same period. He was a traveller, and wrote five books containing a history of the affairs of the Church from the death of Christ to his own time, of which nothing remains but some fragments preserved by Eusebius. One of these, however, bears so interesting a testimony to the extension and unity of the Church, that we cannot forbear transcribing it. Speaking of his journey from Corinth to Rome, during which he visited many bishops, he adds, "in every succession

and in every city, the same doctrine is taught, which the law and the Prophets and the Lord preached."

12. Melito, bishop of Sardis, is placed about the year 170. He was the author of several works, of which Eusebius gives us the following catalogue. Two books concerning Easter: Rules of life, and of the Prophets: Of the Church: A discourse of the Lord's Day: Another of the Nature of Man, and of his formation: Of the Obedience of the Senses to faith: Of the soul and body, or of the mind: Concerning Baptism: Of Truth and of Faith, and the Generation of Jesus Christ: his Book of Prophecy, and of Hospitality: and the Key: and of Satan: and the Revelation of John: another book, the title of which is doubtful: and his Apology, addressed to the Emperor Marcus Antoninus. These books are all lost, except a few fragments; but the very titles of them prove how well settled the customs of the Church, and the Canon of the New Testament must have been at that early day.

13. The next document is of a very interesting character; viz. the epistle of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons, which Eusebius has preserved entire, amongst his acts of the martyrs. It gives a most affecting and detailed account of a violent persecution which raged against the Christians during the reign of the last mentioned Emperor, Marcus Antoninus, and may be referred to the year 177.

14. St. Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, succeeded Pothinus, (who was a martyr in the last mentioned persecution,) and flourished about 170. His work against the Gnostics has come down to our time, and is in high esteem. In it the New Testament Scriptures are

specially particularized. The four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, 13 epistles of St. Paul, nearly all the other epistles, and the Revelation, are copiously referred to in the plainest terms.

15. Athenagoras, an Athenian Philosopher and a polite and classic writer, was the author of two pieces which have reached our time: an Apology for the Christians, addressed to Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and his son Commodus, and a treatise on the Resurrection. The period to which these are referred, is about the year 177. The doctrines and the books of the New Testament are recognized very plainly, and to a considerable extent, in those pieces.

16. Miltiades was a Christian author of the reign of Commodus, about the year 180, spoken of by Eusebius, Tertullian, and Jerome for 'his learning and ability, and his zeal for the divine oracles in his books against both Jews and Gentiles.' No work of his, however, has reached our time.

17. Theophilus, the sixth bishop of Antioch, succeeded Eros in the year 168. Only three books of his have reached us, addressed to Autolycus, a learned and studious heathen, containing the elements of religion. But he was the author of many other works of reputation. In the books which have reached us, his references to the greater part of the New Testament Scriptures are manifest and copious.

18. Pantænus, master of the celebrated catechetical school at Alexandria, about the year 181, was the author of Commentaries upon the Scriptures, mentioned by Jerome, but nothing from his pen has reached our time except a short passage in the Eclogue ascribed to Clement of Alexandria, containing a rule for the better understanding of the Prophets.

19. St. Clement of Alexandria, who seems to have succeeded Pantænus as master of the catechetical school at Alexandria, in A. D. 190, was an author of many celebrated works, of which several are preserved to our own day, viz. an Exhortation to the Gentiles: the Pædagogue or Instructer, in three books: the Stromata, or various discourses in eight books: and a small treatise entiled, 'Who is the Rich Man that may be saved.' His testimony to the four Gospels, and nearly all the other books of the New Testament, is clear and copious.

20. Polycrates, was bishop of the Church in Ephesus, and flourished in the time of the Emperor Severus who began his reign A. D. 193. His answer to Victor, the bishop of Rome, upon the subject of the dispute that arose about the time of keeping Easter, is preserved in Eusebius, where he says that he was the eighth of his family who had been bishops, that he was sixty-five years old, had conversed with brethren in many parts of the world, and had read all the Holy Scriptures so as to be confident that his opinion as to the time of the festival agreed with the old and prevailing practice.

All these witnesses, besides many others, mentioned by Eusebius and Jerome, viz. Heraclitus, Maximus, Candidus, Appion, Sextus, and Arabianus, belong to the very next age after the Apostles. Most of them were men of talents and learning, converted from heathenism to the faith of Christ, who, after their conversion, engaged publicly and at all hazards in the defence of the Gospel. And this fact, as Dr. Chalmers well observes, adds value to their testimony, because they are not only witnesses of the existence of Christianity,

of the canon of the New Testament, and of the extension of the Church, but their sincerity and consistency are demonstrated by their devotion to the cause, at the cost of their own comfort and the risk of persecution, even unto death.

21. Serapion, the eighth bishop of Antioch, governed that primitive see, from A. D. 190, to 211. He wrote many pieces, now lost, of some of which however, Eusebius speaks particularly. But what seems especially worthy of note in Serapion, is that he condemned the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, which is supposed to have been a composition of Leucius the heretic, a famous forger of apocryphal pieces.

22. We next turn to Tertullian, the most ancient Latin father now remaining, who flourished from the year 192, to 216, was a presbyter of Carthage, the son of a proconsular tribune, and probably a convert from heathenism. His works have come down to us in good preservation, and in the highest esteem. And they clearly demonstrate the integrity of the four Gospels, and defend them against the attempts of the heretic Marcion to mutilate them—besides which he quotes largely from the Acts of the Apostles, all of St. Paul's epistles, one of St. John's, one of St. Peter, St. Jude, and the Revelation. He also furnishes evidence, that in his time there was a translation of them in common use, when, explaining a passage in 1 Cor. he says, 'it is not so in the authentic Greek, as we have it in the copies vulgarly used.' And he plainly testifies that the Scriptures were in his day public writings, easily accessible and well known. In his apology addressed to the Roman Presidents or to the magistrates of Carthage, he says, 'whosoever of you, therefore, think

that we have no concern for the safety of the Emperors, look into the words of God, our Scriptures, which we ourselves do not conceal, and which many accidents bring into the way of those who are not of our religion.'[1] One passage more we cannot refrain from quoting, because it shows the respect paid to the Apostolic Churches. 'If' says Tertullian, 'you be willing to exercise your curiosity profitably in the business of your salvation, visit the Apostolical Churches, in which the very chairs of the Apostles still preside, in which their very authentic letters are recited, sounding forth the voice and representing the countenance of each one of them. Is Achaia near you? You have Corinth. If you are not far from Macedonia, you have Philippi—you have Thessalonica. If you can go to Asia, you have Ephesus. But if you are near to Italy, you have Rome, from whence we also may be easily satisfied.'[2]

Passing by several other Christian writers of the second century, viz. Aristides, Agrippa Castor, Aristo of Pella, Soter, bishop of Rome, Pinytus, bishop of

---

[1] Qui ergo putaveris nihil nos de salute Cæsarum curare, inspice Dei voces, literas nostras, quas neque ipsi supprimimus, et plerique casus ad extraneos transferunt.—*Apol. cap.* 31. *p.* 30. *D.*

[2] Age jam, qui voles curiositatem melius exercere in negotio salutis tuæ, percurre ecclesias apostolicas, apud quas ipsæ adhuc cathedræ apostolorum suis locis præsident; apud quas ipsæ authenticæ literæ eorum recitantur, sonantes vocem, et repræsentantes faciem, unius cujusque. Proxima est tibi Achaia? habes Corinthum. Si non longe es a Macedonia, habes Philippos, habes Thessalonicenses. Si potes Asiam tendere, habes Ephesum. Si autem Italiæ adjaces, habes Romam, unde nobis quoque auctoritas præsto est.—*De Præscrip. cap.* 36. *p.* 245. *B.*

Gnossus in Crete, Philip, bishop of Gortyna, Palmas, bishop of Pontus, Modestus, Musanus, Claudius Apollinaris, bishop of Hierapolis, Bardesanes, Apollonius the martyr, Rhodon, Victor, bishop of Rome, Bachylus, bishop of Corinth, Theophilus, bishop of Cesarea, Narcissus, bishop of Jerusalem, and Symmachus,—and also omitting any particular notice of those Apocryphal books, such as the travels of Paul and Thecla, the Sybilline Oracles, the Clementine Recognitions, and the Testaments of the twelve Patriarchs, which had a partial circulation during the second century, but were never received as of Canonical authority,—we proceed to

§ 2. The writers of the third century.

23. Minucius Felix, who flourished about A. D. 210, was the author of an excellent defence of the Christian religion, in the form of a dialogue between Cæcilius Natalis, a heathen, and Octavius Januarius a Christian, in which Minucius is supposed to sit as judge.

24. Apollonius, who wrote, about A. D. 211, an excellent work against the Montanists, of which, however, only some portions are extant.

25. Caius, the author of a book against Proculus, a leader of the Cataphrygians, of which, together with two other works ascribed to him, there are some fragments remaining.

26. St. Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem, flourished in A. D. 212, and was a martyr at Cesarea, in the seventh persecution, under Decius. He established a library at Jerusalem.

27. Hippolytus, bishop of Portus in Italy, as is supposed, was the author of several religious works,

and a martyr. He flourished A. D. 220, and a monument of marble was dug up near Rome, in 1551, which is generally supposed to belong to him. It is doubtful whether any of his genuine works have reached us, except the fragments preserved by Theodoret; but in these, his recognition of nearly all the books of the New Testament, including the Revelation, and his reverence for them, calling them the 'Sacred Fountain' and the 'Sacred Scriptures,' is very manifest.

28. Ammonius, the author of a 'Harmony of the Gospels,' may be placed next, having flourished about the same period.

29. Julius Africanus, placed usually about A. D. 220, was the author of several religious works of reputation, especially of a book of Chronology, beginning at the Mosaic history, coming down to the death of Christ, and thence to the Roman Emperor Macrinus.

30. Origen was born in Egypt, A. D. 184 or 185, and died A. D. 253. About A. D. 202, he was appointed Master of the catechetical school at Alexandria when not more than eighteen years old. His learning, his genius, his virtue, his self-denial, and his astonishing labors, form a truly wonderful combination. But what we are chiefly concerned to know at present, is the testimony which this gifted teacher of Christianity bears to the Canon of Scripture; for although the great body of his works, which were immensely voluminous, amounting to some thousands, are lost, yet we still have, in the original Greek, Origen's Treatise on Prayer, his Exhortation to Martyrdom, his Apology for the Christian Religion, in eight books against Celsus the Epicurean, his Epistle to Africanus, another to Gregory Thaumaturgus, and fragments of

some other epistles, a part of his Commentaries upon divers books of the Old and New Testaments, and Philocalia, or extracts from his works made by Gregory Nazianzen, and Basil the great. From these we learn that Origen admitted the whole Canon of the New Testament Scriptures, as we have it at this day; although his opinion of the Epistle of James, the second Epistle of Peter, the second and third of John, and the Epistle of Jude, is not clear. One or two quotations from so celebrated a man, may be desirable on this subject.

In his thirteenth Homily upon Genesis, he says 'Thus Isaac digged again the wells of water which the servants of his father had digged. One servant of his father was Moses, who dug the well of the law, other servants of his father were David and Solomon, and the Prophets, and all they who wrote the books of the Old Testament. * * * * * * Isaac, therefore, again digged new wells, yea, the servants of Isaac digged. The servants of Isaac are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; his servants also are Peter, James, and Jude, as likewise the Apostle Paul; who all dig the wells of the New Testament."[1]

In his seventh Homily upon the book of Joshua,

---

[1] Hoc ergo modo fodit puteos Isaac, quos foderant pueri patris sui. Puer patris sui erat Möyses, qui foderat puteum legis. Pueri patris sui erant David et Salomon, et prophetæ, et si qui alii sunt, qui libros scripserunt Veteris Testamenti. * * * * Fodit ergo Isaac et novos puteos, imo pueri Isaac fodiunt. Pueri sunt Isaac, Matthæus, Marcus, Lucas, et Joannes; pueri ejus sunt Petrus, Jacobus, et Judas; puer ejus est et Apostolus Paulus; qui omnes Novi Testamenti puteos fodiunt.—*Orig. Hom. in Gen. xiii. p.* 95. *A. Tom. II ed. Bened.*

Origen speaks more fully to the same purpose, under another figure. 'But when,' says he, 'our Lord Jesus Christ came, of whom Joshua the son of Nun was but a type, he sent forth the priests, his Apostles, bearing well-beaten trumpets, sounding the glorious heavenly doctrine. Matthew sounds first with his priestly trumpet, in his Gospel; Mark also, and Luke, and John, sounded with their priestly trumpets. Peter likewise sounds aloud with the two trumpets of his epistles; James also, and Jude. And John sounds again with his trumpet in his epistles, and the Revelation; and Luke also once more, relating the actions of the Apostles. Last of all comes he who said, (1 Cor. 4, 9.) 'For I think that God has set forth us the Apostles last;' and sounding with the trumpets of his fourteen Epistles, he threw down to the foundations the walls of Jericho, and all the engines of idolatry, and all the schemes of the philosophers.'[1] Many other pasages might be added from Origen, in favor of the Sacred Scriptures, but our limits forbid.

---

1 Veniens ergo Dominus noster Jesus Christus, cujus ille prior filius Nave designabat adventum, mittit sacerdotes apostolos suos portantes tubas ductiles, prædicationis magnificam cœlestemque doctrinam. Sacerdotali tubâ primâ in evangelio suo Matthaeus increpuit. Marcus quoque, Lucas et Joannes, suis singulis tubis sacerdotalibus cecinerunt. Petrus etiam duabus epistolarum suarum personat tubis; Jacobus quoque et Judas. Addit nihilominus adhuc et Joannes tubâ canere per epistolas suas, et Apocalypsim; et Lucas, apostolorum gesta describens. Novissime autem ille veniens, qui dixit, 'Puto autem nos Deus novissimos apostolos ostendit;' et in quatuordecim epistolarum suarum fulminans tubis, muros Jericho, et omnes idololatriæ machinas, et philosophorum dogmata, usque ad fundamenta dejecit.—*Orig. Hom. in lib. Jes.* VII. *ib. p.* 412. *AB.*

31. St. Gregory, bishop of Neocæsarea in Pontus, was one of Origen's most celebrated scholars. He was ordained in the year 240 and died A. D. 265, having obtained the surname of Thaumaturgus or the Wonder-Worker, from many miracles said to be performed by him. It is unquestionable that he was a man of eminent sanctity and learning, and wonderfully successful in his ministry. Some of his works have reached our time which are usually admitted to be of very uncommon excellence. His sentiments on the canon of Scripture, appear to be the same as Origen's.

32. Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, was consecrated A. D. 247 and died A. D. 264 or 5, being the thirteenth bishop in the succession of that Diocese. He was also a very eminent man for talents and learning; and adopted the same Canon of Scripture as Gregory, save only that he doubted whether John the author of the Revelation, was John the Apostle of our Lord.

33. St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was converted from heathenism, and baptized in A. D. 244, ordained presbyter A. D. 247, and consecrated bishop in A. D. 248 or 9, having been previously a remarkably eminent professor of rhetoric. He had a good estate, which, soon after his conversion, he sold, and gave to the poor. He was distinguished for sundry acts of generous benevolence, and was a martyr under the Emperor Valerian on the 14th of Sept. A. D. 258. His works, consisting of tracts and epistles, have come down to us in good preservation. And in them he bears the most full and decided testimony to all the books of the New Testament except only the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistle to Philemon, the epistle of James, the 2nd epistle of Peter, and the epistle of Jude.

34. Novatus, was the founder of the sect of the Novatians, and flourished A. D. 251. A very few only of his works have come down to us, but there is no doubt that he received the Scriptures of the New Testament as they were held by other writers generally; his schism resting chiefly upon a point of discipline.

It would be tedious, however, to prolong this list by dwelling on each particular name. Suffice it to say that Commodian, A. D. 270, Malchion, a presbyter of Antioch, A. D. 270, Anatolius, bishop of Laodicea about the same time, Theognostus, A. D. 282, Thomas, bishop of Alexandria, A. D. 282, Victorinus, bishop of Pettaw, A. D. 290, Methodius, bishop of Olympas, A. D. 290, Lucian, a presbyter of Antioch and martyr, who flourished A. D. 290, Pamphilus, a presbyter and martyr, A. D. 294, Phileas, bishop of Thmuis in Egypt, A. D. 296, likewise a martyr, Peter, bishop of Alexandria, Archelaus, a bishop of Mesopotamia, A. D. 280, Arnobius, A. D. 297, not to mention Lactantius, whom some place in A. D. 303. 6,– all these are cited as bearing witness, directly or indirectly, to the same points, viz. the authority, the number, and the sacred character of the books of the New Testament. We have set down the foregoing list in order to shew how abundant is the testimony on this subject, from the Apostles' days to the close of the third century, and how totally absurd is the favorite allegation of the infidel that the books of the New Testament were not known as authoritative until the council of Nice, A. D. 326, and that then they were settled by vote! For it is plain from what has been shewn, that but a very small part of those books were ever doubted by Christians at large. The four Gospels,

the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen epistles of St. Paul, the first of Peter, the first of John, were never subject to any question. The rest were admitted by far the greater number, nor indeed is any point of faith or practice dependent upon the controversy.

The mode in which the Canon was formed, was not by the authority of councils, but the books of which it consists were known to be the genuine writings of the Apostles and Evangelists, by tradition. And this generally concurring or universal tradition is the true ground, not to say the only one, by which any ancient work is recognized amongst mankind. It is, indeed, often said that the council of Laodicea settled the Canon of the New Testament. But long before, there had been a general agreement of Christians what books were canonical and what not, and the decree of the council recognizes this agreement, and is based upon it. The decree, however, is important, as being evidence of the fact, and further evidence of the care taken not to suffer any other writings to be read in Churches but those of divine authority.

The time of holding this council is not certain; it is, however, generally agreed that it was after the council of Nice. Some have considered it as held while Silvester was Pope, others, and perhaps more correctly, during the time of Liberius, about the year 364. We cite the words of the 59th and 60th Canons, which refer to the point in question.

CANON LIX.

It is not fit that private or secular psalms be read in the Churches, nor any books that are not canonical,

but only the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.' [1]

CANON LX.

'These are they which ought to be read from the Old Testament. 1. Genesis, 2. Exodus, 3. Leviticus, 4. Numbers, 5. Deuteronomy, 6. Joshua, 7. Judges, Ruth, 8. Esther, 9. 1st and 2nd of Kings, 10. 3d and 4th of Kings, 11. 1st and 2nd of Chronicles, 12. 1st and 2nd of Ezra, 13. Psalms, 150, 14. Proverbs, 15. Ecclesiastes, 16. the Song of Songs, 17. Job, 18. twelve minor Prophets, 19. Isaiah, 20. Jeremiah and Baruel, the Lamentations and Epistles, 21. Ezekiel, 22. Daniel. And these of the New Testament. The four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Acts of the Apostles, seven Catholic Epistles, viz. of James one. of Peter two. of John three. of Jude one. the fourteen Epistles of Paul, to the Romans one, to the Corinthians two, to the Galatians one, to the Ephesians one, to the Philippians one, to the Colossians one, to the Thessalonians two, to the Hebrews one, to Timothy two, to Titus one, to Philemon one."[2]

νθ'.

[1] "Οτι 'ου δεῖ ἰδιωτικους ψαλμους λέγεσθαι ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, 'ουδὲ 'ακανονιζα βιβλία, 'αλλα' μονα τα' κανονικα' της καινης καὶ παλαιας διαθηκης.

θ'.

[2] "Οσα δει βιβλία 'αναγινωσκεσθαι της παλαιας διαθηκης. α'. Γενέσις κοσμου. β'. "Εξοδος 'εξ Αἰγυπτου. γ'. Λευιτικον. δ'. 'Αριθμοί. έ. Δευτερονομιον. ς'. 'Ιησους Ναυῆ. ζ'. Κριται. 'Ρυθ. η'. 'Εσθηρ. θ'. Βασιλειων, ά. β'. ί. Βασιλειων, γ'. δ'. ιά. Παραλειπομενα, ά. β'. ιβ'. "Εσδρας, ά. β'. ιγ'. Βίβλος

CHAPTER III.

§ 1. The testimony borne by some heathen documents, to the truth of the Gospel facts.

There are several assertions amongst the early Christian apologists, that Pontius Pilate transmitted an account of Christ, to the Emperor Tiberius, in consequence of which Tiberius proposed to the Senate that he should be enrolled among the gods. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and afterwards Eusebius, testify on this subject.

The first apology of Justin Martyr, presented to Antoninus Pius, A. D. 150, after mentioning the crucifixion of the Saviour, and the attendant circumstances, proceeds to say, "and that these things were so done,

---

ψαλμων ρν'. ιδ' Παροιμίαι Σολομωντος. ιέ. Ε'κκλησιάζής. ις'. Α'σμα ἀσμάτων. ιζ'. Γ'ώβ. ιή. Δώδεκα προφῆται. ιθ'. Ἡσάιας. κ. Ἱερεμιας καὶ Βαρεχ, θρῆνοι καὶ ἐπιζολαί. κά. Ἰεζεκίηλ. κβ'. Δανίηλ. Τὰ δὲ της καινης διαθήκης, ταυτα. Εὐαγγέλια τέσσαρα, κατὰ Ματθαῖον, κατὰ Μάρκον, κατὰ Λεκᾶν, κατὰ Ἰωάννην. Πράξεις ἀποζόλων. Ἐπιζολαὶ καθολικαὶ ἑπτὰ, ἅτως. Ἰακώβε μία, Πετρε δύο, Ἰωάννε τρεῖς, Ἰούδα μία. Ἐπιζολαὶ Παύλε δεκατεσσαρες. πρὸς Ρὠμαίες μία, πρὸς Κορινθίους δύο, πρὸς Γαλάτας μία, πρὸς Ἐφεσιους μία, πρὸς Φιλιππησίους μία, πρὸς Κολοσσαεῖς μία, προς Θεσσαλονικεῖς δυο, πρὸς Ἑβραίους μία, πρὸς Τιμόθεον δύο, πρὸς Τίτον μια, πρὸς Φιλήμονα μια.—*Sacr. Concil. Mansi, tom. 2. p. 574.*

you may learn from the acts made in the time of Pontius Pilate."[1]

In the apology of Tertullian, about A. D. 200, he says, 'There was an ancient decree that no one should be received for a deity, unless he was first approved by the senate. Tiberius, in whose time the Christian religion had its rise, having received from Palestine in Syria an account of such things as manifested our Saviour's divinity, proposed to the senate, that he should be placed among the gods. The senate refused, because he had himself declined that honor.'[2]

To the same effect, only somewhat amplified, writes Eusebius. In the annals of Tacitus, the celebrated heathen historian, published about A. D. 100, he gives an account of the conflagration which destroyed a large part of Rome in the tenth year of the reign of Nero, with the orders of the emperor for re-building it. The historian then proceeds to speak of the persecution of the Christians in these words. "But neither all human help, nor the liberality of the emperor, nor all the atonements presented to the gods, availed to abate the infamy he lay under of having ordered the city to be set on fire. To suppress, therefore, this common rumor, Nero procured others to be accused, and inflicted exquisite punishment on those people who were

---

[1] *Και ταυτα 'οιι γεγονε, δυνασθε μαθειν εκ των επα Ποντιε Πιλατε γενομενων ακτων.—J. M. ap.* 1. *p.* 76. *C. Paris* 1636.

[2] Vetus erat decretum, ne qui deus ab Imperatore consecraretur, nisi a Senatu probatus.—Tiberius ergo, cujus tempore nomen Christianum in seculum intravit, annuntiata sibi ex Syria Palestina, quae illic veritatem istius divinitatis revelârunt, detulit ad Senatum cum praerogativâ suffragii sui. Senatus, quia non ipse probaverat, respuit—*Tertul. ap. cap.* 5. *p.* 6.

in abhorrence for their crimes, and were commonly known by the name of Christians. They had their name from Christus, who in the reign of Tiberius was put to death as a criminal, by the procurator Pontius Pilate. This pernicious superstition, though checked for a time, broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, the source of this evil, but reached the city also; whither flow from all quarters, all things vile and shameful, and where they find shelter and encouragement. At first, they only were apprehended who confessed themselves of that sect; afterwards a vast multitude, discovered by them: all which were condemned, not so much for the crime of burning the city, as for their enmity to mankind. Their executions were so contrived as to expose them to derision and contempt. Some were covered over with the skins of wild beasts, and torn to pieces by dogs; some were crucified; others having been daubed over with combustible materials, were set up as lights during the night-time, and thus burned to death. Nero made use of his own gardens as a theatre on this occasion, and also exhibited the diversions of the circus, sometimes standing in the crowd as a spectator in the habit of a charioteer, at others driving a chariot himself: till at length these men, though really criminal and deserving exemplary punishment, began to be commiserated, as people who were destroyed, not out of a regard to the public welfare, but only to gratify the cruelty of one man."[1]

---

[1] Sed non ope humanâ, non largitionibus Principis, aut deum placamentis. decedebat infamia, quin jussum incendium crederetur. Ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos, et quaesitissimis poenis

The well known epigram of Martial, who flourished during the latter part of the first century, recognizes the foregoing cruelty, in the following terms. "You have, perhaps, lately seen acted in the theatre, Mucius, who thrust his hand into the fire. If you think such an one patient, valiant, stout, you have the heart of an Abderite. For when you are commanded under the penalty of the troublesome coat, it is a much greater thing to say I will not, than to burn the hand." [1]

The troublesome coat, or tunic, here mentioned, was made like a sack, of paper or coarse linen cloth, and having been first besmeared within and without

---

affecit, quos, per flagitia invisos, vulgus Christianos appellabat. Auctor nominis ejus Christus, qui, Tiberio imperante, per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat. Repressa in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non modo per Judaeam, originem ejus mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocia aut pudenda confluunt, celebranturque. Igitur primo correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens, haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis, convicti sunt. Et pereuntibus addita ludibria, ut ferarum tergis contecti, laniatu canum interirent, aut crucibus affixi, aut flammandi, atque, ubi defecisset dies, in usum nocturni luminis urerentur. Hortos suos ei spectaculo Nero obtulerat, et circense ludicrum edebat, habitu aurigae permixtus plebi vel curriculo insistens. Unde, quamquam, adversus sontes, et novissima exempla meritos, misera tio oriebatur, tamquam non utilitate publicâ, sed in saevitiam unius absumerentur.—*Ann. l.* xv. *c.* 44.

[1] In matutinâ nuper spectatus arenâ
Mucius, imposuit qui sua membra focis,
Si patiens fortisque tibi durusque videtur,
Abderitanæ pectora plebis habes.
Nam, cum dicatur, tunicâ præsente molestâ,
Ure manum, plus est dicere: non facio.

Martial. 1 x. *Epig.* 25.

with pitch, wax, rosin, sulphur, and other combustibles, was put upon the condemned Christian, and that he might be forced to stand upright, so as to resemble a flaming torch, his chin was fastened to a stake fixed strongly in the ground. This horrible device was a favorite mode of execution during the persecution of the tyrant Nero.

The same execrable cruelty is alluded to by Juvenal, whose satires belong to the same period. 'Describe Tigellinus 'says he, (a corrupt minister under Nero,) 'and you shall suffer the same punishment with those who standing burning in their own flame and smoke, their head being held up by a stake fixed to their chin, till they make a long stream (of blood and running sulphur) on the ground.'[1]

But one of the most interesting and important of the heathen testimonies, is that of Pliny the younger, which we shall set forth somewhat more at large.

Caius Plinius Cæcilius Secundus, was born at Como, near Milan, A. D. 61 or 62. He was prætor under the emperor Domitian, and afterwards præfect of the treasury of Saturn, which office seems to have been conferred upon him both by Nerva and Trajan. He was consul in the third year of the reign of Trajan, A. D. 100. He was also augur, and for a while governor of Pontus and Bithynia. While in this province he wrote the famous letter to the Emperor Trajan, about the Christians, which follows at large.

[1] Pone Tigellinum, taedâ lucebis in illâ,
Quâ stantes ardent, qui fixo gutture fumant,
Et latum mediâ sulcum deducit arenâ.

Juven. Sat. 1. *ver.* 155. &c

Pliny to the emperor Trajan wisheth health and happiness.

It is my custom sire, to refer to you every thing of which I doubt. For who can better guide my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never been present at the trials of Christians. Therefore I know not how far it may be usual to punish or to seek after them. Nor have I hesitated a little, as to the difference to be observed on account of their age, whether the treatment of the tender should be the same with that of the robust; whether pardon should not be granted to repentance, so that he who has once been a Christian should be forgiven on ceasing to be so; whether the name itself should be punished, although there be no crimes committed, or whether only the crimes which stand connected with the name.

Meanwhile I have taken this mode with those who were brought as Christians before me. I asked them whether they were Christians. Those who confessed I asked a second and third time, threatening them with punishment. Those who persisted in their acknowledgment I ordered to be led to punishment. For I did not doubt whatever might be their sentiments, that contumacy and inflexible obstinacy deserved to be punished. There were others of the same madness, whom, because they were Roman citizens, I set down to be sent to the city.

By and by, as is customary, the crime spreading itself, many sorts of people fell under my observation. An anonymous accusation was presented to me, containing the names of many, who denied that they were Christians, or had been; and these repeated

after me an invocation of the gods, and sacrificed with wine and incense to your image, which I had ordered to be brought with the statues of the gods for that purpose; besides which, they reviled Christ. None of which things, it is said, can they be compelled to do who are really Christians. These, therefore, I thought fit to discharge.

Others named by the informer, said that they were Christians, and presently denied it. Some said that they had been, but had ceased, some three years ago, some longer, and one above twenty years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods. And they also reviled Christ. But they affirmed that the height of their crime or error was this, that they had been accustomed to meet together before it was light on a stated day, and to sing alternately a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath, not to the commission of any wickedness, but that they would not commit theft, nor robbery, nor adultery, that they would not falsify their word, nor deny a pledge committed to them, when called upon. Which things being done, it had been their custom to separate, and then to come together again to take food, which they ate promiscuously, but innocently; but this they had desisted from, since my edict, in which, according to your commands, I had forbidden such assemblies.

From this I thought it the more necessary to ascertain the truth, by torture, from two maid-servants who were called ministers. But I discovered nothing besides a depraved and excessive superstition.

Therefore, suspending judicial proceedings, I have

hastened to consult you. For it seems to me an affair worthy of consultation, chiefly on account of the numbers endangered ; because many of every age, and of either sex, are brought and will be brought into peril. For the contagion of this superstition has infested not only the cities, but even the villages and fields. Nevertheless, it seems to me that it may be arrested and corrected. Certainly it sufficiently appears that the temples begin to be frequented, which were almost desolate, and the sacred solemnities, though long intermitted, are revived. Victims are every where bought up, which seldom, until lately, found a purchaser. From all which it is easy to conceive that a multitude of men might be reclaimed, if there was granted an opportunity for repentance.'[1]

---

1 C. Plinius Trajano Imp. S. Lib. x. ep. 97.

Solenne est mihi, Domine, omnia, de quibus dubito, ad te referre. Quis enim potest melius vel cunctationem meam regere, vel ignorantiam instruere? Cognitionibus Christianorum interfui nunquam. Ideo nescio, quid et quâtenus aut puniri soleat aut quaeri. Nec mediocriter hæsitavi, sitne aliquod discrimen ætatum, an quamlibet teneri nihil a robustioribus differant: deturne pœnitentiæ venia; an ei,qui omnino Christianus fuit, desiisse non prosit; nomen ipsum, etiam si flagitiis careat, an flagitia cohærentia nomini puniantur. Interim, in iis qui ad me tanquam Christiani deferebantur, hunc sum secutus modum. Interrogavi ipsos, an essent Christiani: confitentes iterum ac tertio interrogavi, supplicium minatus: perseverantes duci jussi. Neque enim dubitabam, qualecumque esset quod faterentur, pervicaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri. Fuerunt alii similis amentiæ; quos, quia cives Romani erant, annotavi in Urbem remittendos. Mox, ipso tractu (al. tractatu) ut fieri solet, diffundente se crimine, plures species inciderunt. Propositus est libellus sine auctore, multorum nomina continens, qui negârunt se esse Christianos, aut fuisse; quum, præeunte me, Deos appellarent, et imagini tuæ (quam, propter hoc,

To this letter of Pliny to Trajan, the emperor sent the following reply. "You have taken the proper course, my Pliny, in your proceedings with those who have been brought before you as Christians. But it is not possible to establish any certain form which shall hold universally. They ought not to be sought after. If they are brought before you and convicted, they must be punished. Nevertheless, he who denies that

---

jusseram cum simulacris numinum afferri) thure ac vino supplicarent; præterea maledixerent Christo; quorum nihil cogi posse dicuntur, qui sunt reverâ Christiani. Ergo dimittendos putavi. Alii, ab indice nominati, esse se Christianos dixerunt: et mox negaverunt; fuisse quidem, sed desiisse; quidam ante triennium, quidam ante plures annos, non nemo etiam ante viginti quoque. Omnes et imaginem tuam, Deorumque simulacra, venerati sunt: ii et Christo maledixerunt. Affirmabant autem, hanc fuisse summam vel culpæ suae vel erroris, quod essent soliti stato die ante lucem convenire, carmenque Christo, quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem; seque sacramento non in scelus aliquod obstringere, sed ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent, ne depositum appellati abnegarent: quibus peractis, morem sibi discedendi fuisse, rursusque coëundi ad capiendum cibum, promiscuum tamen, et innoxium: quod et ipsum facere desiisse post edictum meum, quo, secundum mandata tua, hetaerias esse vetueram. Quo magis necessarium credidi, ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur, quid esset veri, et per tormenta quaerere. Nihil aliud inveni, quam superstitionem pravam et immodicam. Ideoque dilatâ cognitione, ad consulendum te decurri. Visa est enim mihi res digna consultatione, maxime propter periclitantium numerum. Multi enim omnis aetatis, utriusque sexûs etiam, vocantur in periculum, et vocabuntur. Neque civitates tantum, sed vicos etiam atque agros, superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est. Quæ videtur sisti et corrigi posse. Certe satis constat, prope jam desolata templa cœpisse celebrari, et sacra solennia, diu intermissa, repeti; passimque vaenire victimas, quarum adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur. Ex quo facile est opinari, quae turba hominum emendari possit, si sit pœnitentiae locus.'

he is a Christian, and makes it manifest in fact, that is, by invoking our gods, although he was suspected in time past, let him be pardoned on his repentance. No information, however, should be received without a name, in the case of any crime, for this would be of the worst example, nor would such a procedure agree with our age." [1]

The genuineness of these letters is unquestioned. They form a part of Pliny's works, which have reached our time in entire preservation. And they are both particularly mentioned by Tertullian and Eusebius. From this evidence—the evidence of an enemy—a heathen philosopher—having the fullest information, since he was governor of an extensive province of the Roman Empire,—and writing to the emperor, where the utmost exactness must be presumed,—we demonstrate these facts. First, that at the close of the very first century, the Christian religion prevailed above the heathen in Pontus and Bithynia, so that it was diffused not only in the cities, but throughout the villages and fields, and the heathen temples were almost desolate.

Secondly, that Christians were cruelly persecuted

---

[1] Trajanus Plinio S. Lib. x. ep. 98.

'Actum, quem debuisti, mi Secunde, in executiendis causis eorum qui Christiani ad te delati fuerant, secutus es. Neque enim in universum aliquid, quod quasi certam formam habeat, constitui potest. Conquirendi non sunt; si deferantur et arguantur, puniendi sunt; ita tamen, ut qui negaverit se Christianum esse, idque re ipsâ manifestum fecerit, id est, supplicando Diis nostris, quamvis suspectus in praeteritum fuerit, veniam ex pœnitentiâ impetret. Sine auctore vero propositi libelli nullo crimine locum habere debent: Nam et pessimi exempli, nec nostri saeculi est.'

even unto death, only for their profession, without any other crime than refusing to do sacrifice to the gods of the heathen and to revile their Redeemer—and this, not by such men as Nero, but by the best of the Roman princes and governors, for the names of Trajan and Pliny are among their brightest ornaments.

Thirdly, that no evil could be found in these primitive disciples, except their unshaken constancy in their religious faith: for although many gave up their profession to save their lives, yet Pliny himself was aware that those who were really Christians could not by any means be induced to desert their allegiance to the Saviour. Stronger and clearer testimony to the extension and character of the Church, cannot be desired, than is here given, from the pen of a distinguished heathen,—himself a persecuting magistrate of an intolerant Emperor. And let it be specially marked, that he presents the condition of Christianity in A. D. 106; *only eight or nine years at farthest, after the death of the Apostle John, and but seventy-two years after the crucifixion of the Redeemer!*

We give these corroborative proofs, rather as a matter of supererogation, for the truth of Christianity stands firm on its own authority, and needs no heathen testimony to its power; and we shall close this dissertation, already protracted to an unexpected length, in the words with which the admirable Prof. Lee concludes his Prolegomena; "Plura equidem dare potui, meliora doctior quivis: quod potui præstiti: et ni negotiis pœnè innumeris fuissem distractus, hæc qualiacunque antehâc sane præstitissem."

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01012 5369